

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the top right, a silver laptop is partially visible, showing the keyboard and trackpad. To the left of the laptop, there's a coiled white cable and a small purple circular object. A green plant with long, thin leaves is on the left side. In the bottom left, a white notebook is open, showing the text "DO WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY!" and a blue pen. To the right of the notebook, there are three blue pens, a blue pen case with the "STAEDTLER" logo, and a blue smartphone case. The background is a light-colored wooden surface with a natural grain pattern.

Pocket Professional

Productivity & Professionalism in
the Freelance Industry

James Butterly

Introduction

Have you ever been stuck in a rut, not knowing what direction to go in with your professional creative career? Are you stuck in an amateur's mindset? How do I become great? How do I make a name for myself in my industry? How do I create an audience of devout followers who value my work and what I have to say, my views and opinions?

That's what this book is for. Inside you will find insights, topics, subjects, all relating to creativity, productivity and professionalism in the design and freelance industry. You'll read about the best practices, tips and daily routines that you can slowly start to implement into your professional process to help you become a better worker.

Although the topics discussed relate to the subject of productivity and processes in the design/freelance industry and is aimed at young creatives looking for a sense of direction in their professional career, the information can be extrapolated and applied to many different industries. It's about how you apply the information to your own situation that will help you most effectively.

I don't expect you to agree with or practice every topic in the book. These are the topics that I have experienced, have strong views on, and have helped me start from nothing to get where I am going now. The mindsets, the practices, the routines.

The book was not created to tell you how to work and that you need to change, it was created to challenge how you work.

Discover what works best for you then optimise and maximise it.

About The Author

When I finished college in 2012 with my degree in Multimedia, I found myself lost for what step to take next, how to grow my skills, gain and attain new knowledge. I didn't know how to focus on one particular subject. I was still in the 'multiple' mindset from college after studying several pursuits for 4 years. I had no direction with my professional career. In fact, a professional is the last thing I would consider myself. And that was 3 years ago at the time of writing this book.

I knew this had to change, because I'm not the type of person to remain stagnant, I was only young, I had yet to even start my career. I didn't even know how to take the first step. But I knew I loved learning. I wanted to be taken serious in my career, make a name for myself and leave a legacy. So I began exploring the world of handlettering and professionalism. Even simple google searches for these subjects led me to a wealth of knowledge on various topics within the industry.

At this point, it was the beginning of 2014 and I had discovered the 'Seanwes' Podcast. It may sound dramatic, but from here on my professional career, and to an extent my life, would change drastically. How I thought, my mindsets and approaches to people, work and life were altered by the mature and professional approaches to the topics discussed. It wasn't just another podcast on design. This was the greatest information I had ever heard in my life.

This is when the hunger began. My approach to my career had changed. Before the podcast I hadn't practiced handlettering and about a month of listening to the podcast, I knew this is what I wanted to focus on, this is what I wanted to be known for.

I consumed so much information on self help and productivity from online and books, I was addicted to growing myself and becoming better as a person and in the work I did.

The hustle began, and still continues to this day. I'm even hungrier now than I was back then. Productivity breeds productivity.

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Also, a special thanks to all those who provide value for free. Free books, blogs, tutorials, courses, videos. They are the people making a difference to those looking to take the first step to bettering themselves and pursuing their passion. Your efforts don't go unnoticed.

Thank you.

01: The Secret Lives of Early Risers

As creatives, so much of our time is spent producing and sharing content. But with the rise in smartphones, it has become easier to consume any and every piece of content we can access on our phones. As producers, our sole focus should be to produce first and consume second. With any activity, if you want to do it first, the best time to do it is in the morning.

Production should be the first thing your brain focuses on when you wake up early. Otherwise, you squander the valuable sleep that your body has recovered that night. **Produce in the morning, don't consume.**

In the morning, your brain is free to concentrate clearly. It isn't weight down by the rest of the days consumed content. Be it articles, images, notifications, news, emails, audio. All of these facets of content have to be processed and throughout the day they stack, reducing your brains concentrative power.

As I try to build my own website, communicate with clients, create artwork, write and the various other tasks involved with setting yourself up as a business, the work had to be done when I finished my day job. This was really difficult, first because of the time constraint, and second because I was feeling creatively drained when I arrived home. But I couldn't stay up and become a night owl because of my job the next day. I have never been a night owl in my life and I'm certainly not about to become one. Let me tell you why you shouldn't either.

I am an early riser. I have always been. I aim to wake up earlier and earlier each day. If you want to train yourself to wake up early but perform your

tasks at the same efficiency, set your alarm at 15-minute intervals, slowly and gradually earlier each morning. Here are some key points to waking early and getting stuff done:

- **Use a sleep-cycle app**, it will tell you the optimum time for going to bed so you will feel as refreshed as possible the next morning when you wake up.
- **Set your phone to 'Do Not Disturb' mode**, or just turn off all the notifications on your phone. This will keep you from being distracted and wandering through endless feeds.
- **Create a task list** so that you have a direction to follow first thing in the morning, and you know what needs to be done.
- **Arrange an accountability partner**. Someone who you're responsible to check-in with. Even arrange it with a monetary value at stake, and I assure you, you will be spurred on.

The key is to not consume any piece of information, including notifications and emails. Having a task list of to-do's gives your brain some focus, and a direction to go when you wake up allowing you to jump straight into the work without having to plan what you have to do.

It's all about habit. It takes your body 22 days for something to become habitual. If you're a self confessed night owl, and you feel that you can do the same amount of work late at night, you owe it to yourself to at least try this approach. It can be a viscous cycle when you're used to staying up late, when you believe you are night owl this becomes your mindset and essentially opens the flood gates to allow you to stay up late because you believe that's what you are.

Log or document your results and prove me wrong. Be excited about the work that you are doing, it will make it easier for you to wake up to.

"I like to work while the world sleeps, and share while the world works" – Austin Kleon

02: How I Learned To Steal

Nothing is original. Everything that has already been done and everything to follow will forever be a remix.

Once you get passed this mental roadblock, you will be a step closer to being in a mindset that allows you to create work that is unique to your own style. Work that carries your own signature. When you're a young artist, you look to those who inspire you, and if you're ever in a place where you question your motives as to why you ever chose to go down whatever path it may be, you look to those people who inspired you as a reason to why you are doing what you do.

I was in this situation when I first started designing. I had many artists that influenced my design direction. I loved many different styles and would seek to replicate my favorite artist's style in my work. I wanted their work to become my own. I wanted to embody everything about their work. This is exactly where many young designers would start. I'm sure, as a young designer starting in any creative field, you have found yourself encompassing this mindset too, its natural.

This is where you will fail to grow as an artist. You are straight copying your inspiration, when you should **steal from them**.

Now, when I say steal, I don't mean this in a bad sense, it's a great thing. To steal means you encompass, you adopt. Their mindset, their ideals, their values, whatever trait it is about the work or artists that inspire you, mold it, make it your own for the sake of practice and getting better. Steal things that

truly resonate with you, this way it will help you craft your own unique style, creating something that is authentic to you. It will establish recognisability within your work. This will attract clients that will want your style for their brand or business, because its unique to you, you have developed it, crafted it, and are recognised by it.

Think of all the artists you follow on Instagram and Twitter. You follow them for a reason. They have a style and you know them for that style. They have honed and crafted this for years through thousands of hours of work. These artists are consistent with their work and that's why you follow them. They have stolen ideas and methodologies from their inspiration, molded it to become their own, whether it be a process, a vision, an idea, anything. They were in the exact situation that you were in at one stage. Here are a couple of points that may help you steal:

- **Carry a notebook** – as a designer/creative, this should be instilled in you anyway. I mean all the time. Have some paper and a pen with you wherever you are. Some of my best ideas come to me while on the train, sitting at my desk in my day job, out for coffee. You never know when inspiration will strike. You may overhear a conversation that sparks an idea, or a design on a poster or menu that inspires a design.
- **Create a digital mood board** – this allows you to gather artwork that inspires you, if ever you have a mental block or are stuck for some inspiration, open it up for instant idea generation. This will also be the work you like to look at, work that you absorb and is thrilling for you. You would be surprised with what you can come up with when your favorite artist's work is alongside one another.

I'm sure by now you realize that by stealing, I'm not talking about passing someone else's work off as your own. I'm talking about ideas, mindsets, and values. Look to your heroes for inspiration and see what inspires them.

“What is originality? Undetected plagiarism” – William Ralph Inge

03: Picking a Passion and Sticking With it

We all have different passions. Creative people at their very core are actively pursuing many different outlets. They just want to harness their creative energy and output work in any field or direction. This is why we see so many creative people who are designers, but are also painters, musicians, videographers, writers, and photographers etc. The list goes on. It's natural for these types of people to vent their creativity into multiple passions at the same time. Which is great, I believe that you can never have enough hobbies.

If this list sounds like you, then you will know exactly what I am talking about. You want to share all of your creative work with anyone, everywhere. You may have 5, 6, even 8 of these practices on your website, as a portfolio, to show to whoever comes by. I too, fell guilty to this process. We all have outlets that we love. We want to share our time equally across all of our passions and incorporate as much of these into our personality and professionalism as our time and ability will allow. If this sounds like you, then **you need to stop.**

If your goal is to sustain yourself with your passion, be it a designer, musician, or photographer etc. You're going to have to sacrifice some aspect of your creative output. Pursue the one that will potentially offer the greatest opportunity to you under your circumstances, and provide the greatest platform to transition to the next, after you have weathered your current passion to its full capacity, so that you can give it no more. **Pursue one passion.**

This isn't to say that you will never be returning to any of your other passions again. But in order to best take full advantage of your own creative talents, you should focus solely on one. This will keep your mind fully concentrated

on one pursuit, instead of diluted across many different ones. **Be epically good at what you do.**

This is a hard task, believe me, I have been in the same starting position, wondering which passion to pursue. Like many other people, I have many different interests and hobbies that I would love to transition into a profession. I even had them on show before I redesigned my website to focus on design. I knew all of these together would not help me become discovered or revered as an artist in one particular field or profession. **Just pick one thing and start.**

Each passion possesses a certain skill set, something you learn, or have learned along the way to help you develop at that practice. These skills are transferable and lend themselves to multiple different passions you can take with you and apply to different instances of your one passion that you decide to pursue. One passion lends itself to another.

You must deliberately practice at one passion in order to become great at it.

By now, you're probably thinking, "what if I get bored with this one passion after a week?" Well, then you haven't even started. We all go through spells. One month you could like photography then you could see an inspiring design style the next month and try that to see if you like it. This is where you have to relieve yourself of this mindset, constantly chopping and jumping from one thing to the next. You will know what your passion is. It's the thing you come back to the most, of any other creative outlet. You have to actively practice this one passion. Otherwise, it's not a passion it's a distraction.

When you finally pick the one passion you want to pursue, you're then going to ask yourself, "What if I am missing out?" Don't let this fear of feeling like you're missing out on other areas and creative outlets keep you from com-

mitting the time that your one passion deserves. This feeling can be paralyzing and prevent you from beginning to pursue anything at all. Embrace the constraint of your one passion. **Make it the center of your creative focus.** You owe it to yourself and your talent, to try this approach.

Be open, experiment with different outlets, research your favorite artists. By focusing on your passion, you will create an audience. Your work will resonate with the people who chose to follow you for you for your talent, hard work, and dedication. Your greatest passion may be one you don't even know exists yet. But when you find your true passion, you will know.

04: Why I Stopped Caring About What Others Think

It's an age-old conundrum that plagues many people and none more than artists and professionals. The aim of seeking approval from your peers, the yearning to be accepted amongst the best of class and considered to be excellent amongst your field of profession. The fear of not being accepted or having your work rejected by people or a community can be devastating for your motivation and conviction to your work. But even more so is the fear of being rejected for your personality.

Creatives may say, "I don't care what people think", when in reality, they do, but reflected from a certain audience. The work that they create is aimed at a particular audience, those who followed them for what they do. The audience enjoy the quality of their work 1st, then after, seek to know the artists personality. This is when they get to know the artist's goals and passions.

When you speak with passion and conviction about your goals, you can attract comments both positive and critical, from people with different backgrounds and viewpoints. They see the world in a different light. **Everybody is different, even you and your work.**

The sooner you realize that people and even professionals from whom you seek approval from are surrounded by a different set of circumstances, the more you can feel confident about the quality of the work you post publicly. **The work will always speak for itself. Focus on quality.**

That's not to say you should be ignoring comments made about your work (which is another topic entirely), but when you're starting off, encourage-

ment from outside sources goes a very long way. A lot can be said for a kind word from another artist who appreciates your work. From a like on your Instagram to a supportive comment on Facebook. It all factors towards a positive outlook of your work and builds your confidence when you start off, reassuring yourself that this is why you started in the first place. Encouragement is key to a young artist.

When I redesigned my website, I received comments and feedback. The feedback was received from several people from different backgrounds, some comments I had asked for, some I had not. This made me think about subjective and objective views towards design and the decision making process.

Subjective – personal opinions, interpretations, points of view, emotions and judgment.

Objective – fact-based, measurable and observable.

After weighing up and analysing the comments, I realized that somewhere from a subjective viewpoint. These are the types of comments that discredit your decision-making ability and question your choice of a particular element in your process. In something that is loosely termed, a 'backseat designer'. "Use this", "this is better", "I think". We have all heard this about our work.

But here's the thing. You chose a particular design because that is what you decided was the best possible solution to the problem. Not anyone else. You made that decision through your thought process, breaking it down, weighing different concepts and reviewing it in different situations and circumstances. What you should understand with regards to caring about what others think about your work is that someone has an outside view to your mindset. Your set of circumstances are entirely different where outsiders views don't

take into account the criteria, boundaries, the aim/objective and the style of which was asked of you to create when you approach a piece of work. Don't get discouraged.

Keep working, you will be discovered. Don't take it personally if your work is influenced from someone even if you don't realise, everything has already been done.

05: Make Something Everyday

Before I took the step to create my new website, a few months prior, I wanted to take my design work more serious and focus fully on that pursuit. I used to create artwork from various aspects of the design field, such as posters, graffiti, flat illustration, typography. I would change every week and start something in a new area, hoping to uncover what aspect of design I loved the most. It's hard to give your utmost concentrative power and focus to an area that you are not really passionate about, you don't want to dedicate your precious time devoted to something you don't want to make a conviction to. Which is why it can be scary to niche down to one thing.

Through years of searching for an area in design that I'm passionate about, I finally found lettering & typography style badges to be an area that I love. The challenge of confinement, the boundaries, the typographical elements, and colouring among many other problems to solve is what I find most rewarding. I found what I loved the most in design. I wanted to get better, immediately. Around the same time, I stumbled across an article on Medium.com about how to create something every single day and why.

I instantly resonated with what I was reading. I began to create something, everyday, for the first half of the year, to test myself mentally, could I come up with a new design, a meaningful photograph, a drawing etc. Then it struck me. Why don't I focus solely on lettering and badges, and tie in my 'make something everyday' mindset into this newfound love for that area of design? Jackpot.

By making something every day as a creative, you're promoting a consistent mindset, one that you can then take into other aspects of your cre-

ative endeavors. You should create something that directly correlates to your passion or pursuit, otherwise, you're just creating noise.

This creates practice with your passion, you're getting better on purpose by showing up and doing what you want to do, creating work that you want to be known for, a back catalogue of designs that relate to your passion. Making something everyday creates constraints, forcing you to think creatively about generating and learning something new. It allows you to become a practitioner, being actively engaged in your passion.

You're only going to get better by doing, not by reading about, not talking about, or looking up endless tutorials. When you start something and want to become better, you're going to have to put in the hours. Practice daily.

It's incredibly satisfying to have figured out how to do something instead of reading about it, watching it online, or being told. The skill at discovering and problem solving tends to then come naturally as you find out more about your passion for yourself as you continue to make and show up.

Show up every single day.

An easy way to measure your practice is; when you go to bed at night, define what you have created that day, and then define what that is; A drawing? A photograph? A design? A piece of lettering? When you step away from the complete work feel happy with it, feel accomplished.

Learn to let it go, this is a mindset in itself, but very important that you learn to do it. Picture it as, 'this is just for practice, for my eyes only', **every single asset that you create doesn't have to be shown to people.** Although hard, with the ease of putting work online and the psychological drug that is "Likes", it's hard to not show everyone whatever you do. **Not everything needs to be online.**

There is an argument to be made for Quality vs. Quantity. This is why I mentioned that not everything you create needs to be shared with people. Maintain high standards and you will see your work grow exponentially, not in quantity, but in quality.

Only share the work you believe will uphold the greatest qualities of your name.

High standards x Making something everything = Growth in the quality of your work.

06: Limit Yourself To Create Freedom

This may seem like a contradictory headline and it is, in a democratic world where freedom is the pinnacle of social ideology. What I mean by this is, from a creative viewpoint, freedom doesn't facilitate creativity. Restrictions, constraints, and limitations do. Limit yourself, your choices, and put yourself in a box, so you may think creatively to get out of said box. Without any restrictions in your work, there is no direction, and with no direction the work remains open, and with too much openness, there is too much pressure to do really great work. Which more than likely means, you may never start in the first place.

Austin Kleon – “Nothing is more paralyzing than the idea of limitless possibilities”.

Think about your medium, and what you work in, your current circumstances. Ask yourself, “How can I reduce my choices?”. You can try it anywhere and under any medium. You can create a piece of artwork everyday for a month, write a sonnet everyday, take a picture on your way home from your job, create a song with only one synth/drum rack. There is so much opportunity in any field to limit yourself and create great work based on restricted choices.

When you first start a project, define the constraints, write them down and define the box to put yourself in. **This box generates the creativity.** If you still think the project could go in multiple ways, then you haven't limited enough.

If you don't define constraints to a project, what can end up happening is,

that there is so much possible directions to go, this increases the pressure to create excellent work where you never begin the project because the **expectations are set to an insurmountable high.**

Limitations give you a direction to go in. It gives you focus. People want to be told where to go and what to do and how to get there. Impose these restrictions upon yourself and you will find more innovative in your work and more able to solve the problem because there is only one direction to go in.

Endless possibilities and a wide open creative plain also increases the chances that you never even begin in the first place, because of the fear of going in the wrong direction, you don't want to waste your valuable time in a wrong pursuit, just like with finding and starting your passion.

Jack White – “Telling yourself you have all the time in the world, and the money in the world, all the colours in the palette, anything you want, this just kills creativity.

Limit your tools, limit your workspace, and limit your time.

07: How To Find Your Price

This is arguably the hardest part of any creatives job, finding your initial starting price–point. It determines your worth, how you view your ability, and how the client perceives your professionalism.

Start with a baseline price. Young designers starting off in the industry may charge €300 for a logo, or €500 for a static website etc., in or around this ballpark, or perhaps lower if they are in a scarcity mindset where they become desperate for clients. Bearing in mind that these are entry–level starting prices in the industry.

Vary your baseline price according to your client. It's safe to assume that you will charge more to a corporation with a large audience and greater potential rewards for your design than if you're approached by a small startup in your local area, who was perhaps referenced by close friend or family. That's not to say you charge less than your worth. **What's important here is to find your baseline price.**

There are 2 factors to consider in order to dictate your pricing;

Time & Expenses.

Factoring in your expenses; you have your basic survival needs. Your heating, gas bill, and electricity to run your equipment. Your phone bill and internet connection. You may have monthly subscriptions to online services, software, communities, and the tools you need to do the job. Upon various other bills that you pay to survive, your rent, mortgage, or maybe your renting office space. Your food. There are so many aspects to be considered. But make sure you consider them. **Write them down now** if you haven't determined them already. Budget them and you'll know for when the next client.

Factoring in your time; how long it will take to complete the project. What other projects you're doing. What other projects you have said no to in order to take on this project. Time is important to factor because your time is valuable, you could be doing other things.

Value-based pricing; consider your worth, what your work means to the client, the potential returns for the client. **What unique value you are providing them as a professional.**

Build a relationship with the client and a trusting nature. Establish your knowledge in the field by asking questions. Don't be afraid to ask vital questions in order to shape your decision on the value that your services are with worth to the client. If you don't ask, you don't receive.

Ask the right questions; what kind of returns are you expecting? What can I create for you to provide value? What problem can I solve?

Don't rush into pricing or the budget as the first discussion, ask, listen, and provide an insight. Aim to decipher their problem. Otherwise, by talking numbers at the beginning you're directing the client to consider you and your services as an expense. **Establish yourself as an investment, right from the start.**

Have a track record, convey the unique value you offer to potential clients, show your work, and your case studies in your portfolio, curate your work smartly to attract the right clients for the work you want to do.

Knowledge is key. Read books about your field of work, write blogs and articles, do tutorials, listen to podcasts, talk to fellow designers online, in forums, in person, share your ideas and thoughts. Do the work, go to conferences, speak, experiment, use new software, and limit yourself. Know names, get to know artists in your field and the work they do and have done. Use all of these techniques to greater heighten your knowledge about your passion. **Know what you're doing.** If a client comes to you saying they only have the budget for €100 to spend on a

design worth €1,000, politely decline the clients proposal and remind them that they can come back for your services with the remaining €900. This can be difficult, especially starting off. **Money is money, right? Wrong.**

By coping out on the your price and accepting 900 less than the worth of the work, you're devaluing your product, your services, and your professionalism. It's not worth the time and expenses that you dedicate to the work. This also puts a veil on your work and your perceived self-worth and how you value your services. The client will consider you to be less than knowledgeable in your field, and will treat you as an expense not an investment. Most importantly, will be less than likely to return in the future.

People will always charge less. This is something you have to accept when you're starting in the industry. The so-called "will design for 'likes'" artists that you find on fiverr.com.

This type of work screams unprofessionalism and incompetence. It doesn't matter that they charge less. The client will come to you as a professional, a knowledgeable expert in the field, someone who knows what they are doing, and someone who doesn't have to be managed. What professional has to be managed?

Clients will hire you because you will provide the best possible solution to the problem.

So begin to charge what your work is actually valued at, don't be scared, be knowledgeable, and always stand by your values and principles. You're a professional, not a fiverr.com designer.

Stick to your values, stick to your process, stick to your principles. Give the client a reason to come to you.

08: Cull Your Friends

There came a point in my creative pursuit when I started to curate the work I shared with people publicly on my social media outlets, and actively projected what content I shared online with followers.

For one thing, this approach worked wonders for me in building audience of followers I have now at the time of writing this. It built confidence in my work, to share selectively the work I was most proud with, and assured that the decision to carefully curate what I was sharing online was the correct one.

This gives you a way to grow your audience and pays respect to the followers who decided to follow your for your content in the first place. If you want to be known for something and build an audience of loyal followers and supporters, **you have to actively project what you want to be known for.**

But what if you took this approach, and reversed it.

Carefully curating whom you followed on your social media outlets. The way social media is positioned, there is a sense of obligatorily following your friends and family. Being prompted to import your contacts and follow whom you already know on external social media platforms, see “Import contacts from ‘Insert media platform here’”.

If you want to take back your social media, become inspired and motivated, and discover something new is; spend some time to trawl through your archive of hundreds (if not, thousands) of followers and **assess if they are worth following at this moment in time. If not, unfollow.**

This is an especially useful activity to do if you are feeling uninspired or that your lacking quality content from your platform of choice and generally burnt out from social media with an endless feed of noise.

Do you follow the same friends on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram? Do you see the exact same content, posts and images across all three platforms, shared at the same time?

Cull your friends. Start over.

I took this approach earlier this year with my Instagram account. From following 500+ friends, family, artists, brands, designers, musicians, shops, abandoned or inconsistent accounts. I focused on what content mattered to me right then and there, what inspired and influenced my work and provided the utmost quality, and had me generating ideas.

So I curated whom I followed and broke it into categories. For me, these were;

- Hand Lettering
- Badge/Logo Illustration
- Nature Photography

These were the main categories that I broke my following down to, because this was my work area, this is what inspired and motivated my work at this very moment in time. I followed the designers, photographers, and independent brands that inspired me within these areas. **Then from there, cut down even further to create a super-curated feed of quality and value.**

No one can tell you what you are interested in. This is something you have to discover for yourself. Everyone has a different threshold of what they interpret as value.

From curating what I followed, I quickly discovered other sources of inspiration from accounts of the same nature. Designers would link to other accounts that inspired them. It created a network effect, picture a spider diagram. **You were learning what inspired your inspiration, and that is immeasurable.** Like I mentioned in chapter 07: How To Find Your Price, get to know names, and the work associated with that name, it will help you become more knowledgeable in your field.

Fill your feed with content you love to see. Connect with things you care about right now at this moment in time. You may not be inspired or influenced by them in one year's time, and will have moved on from that pursuit and that's perfectly fine. Your taste evolves, as does your influences and circumstances.

This approach assured me that I was getting the best experience from these platforms as possible. The potential for endless inspiration and motivation is greater than you can imagine.

So ask yourself; would you follow you?

09: Are You A Jack-Of-All-Trades?

Creatives by their very nature would self-proclaim to be a jack-of-all-trades. Myself included. It's what we do. We are trying to become great at a number of different fields. We have our hand in the jar of various skills and practices. We want to discover what we like, what we are good at, and what to pursue as our passion. We want to show that we can do everything. This is where I am going to break hearts.

You don't excel in a particular field by doing the bunch of stuff at the same time. You excel at something by focusing specifically on a subject in a particular field. Narrow it down and focus on that one thing.

It's a slow, gradual journey that takes time in order to become a master at something. It's going to take patience. When you focus, you pick up vital skills and processes that you can then transition to the next field much easier and more competently.

Treat it as a season where you can periodically jump from one thing to the next, one at a time, instead of all the time, this makes it easier to carry skills forward to the next thing and being able to apply them to a different field.

You learn the processes, problem solving, and various abilities that come with that practice thus building a background of competence and knowledge associated with that field. Only if you **fully focus on one pursuit at a time rather than trying multiple pursuits at the same time.**

It all comes back to picking a passion you like and just starting to pursue that. If you like a lot of areas, just pick one and start working at it. If you like two or

three and are not sure which one to pick, then just pick one. It shouldn't matter because you like all three of them equally so you hopefully shouldn't feel like you are missing out by not pursuing one. If you do, then by the process of elimination, you'll know which one you want to pursue. It's a win – win.

Clients don't hire Jacks (unless your name is Jack). They hire masters. Someone who is competent, overtly proficient and excels in one field. Not someone who has entry-level skills in an array of practices. **Masters are professionals, adept and ingenuitive, people who know what they are doing.**

From the client perspective, if a client views you as a master in one area, more than likely, you will be perceived as proficient at other areas and pursuits. This is because you have shown that you have applied yourself and are learned in one field, the general assumption from the client would then be to assume that you could apply yourself to other pursuits as successfully as the one you are currently projecting.

“Masters require focus, repetition, consistency, and time” – Sean McCabe

On your journey to becoming a master, you will make progress and one thing will lead to the next, you will become good at different practices, but only by focusing one at a time.

Focus on your one field and aim to become an expert at it, one field at a time. Aim to practice at the specific areas of the field that you struggle at or are bad at. This is the only way to learn and get better, as hard as that may be. Be consistent, by showing up everyday. Give it time, everyone is different. You will know when you have reached a point when you have gathered enough knowledge of a pursuit to become proficient and move onto the next.

Respectively, after time, you may end up circling back around and becoming a jack-of-all-trades. But this time, learned in each pursuit, and knowledgeable in the processes and skills that it takes to master each of them.

10: The Importance of Taking Breaks

“Take a break? I can’t do that, I’m far too busy”, is what you have been telling yourself all along, right? I too fell into this creative pitfall of productivity. Why should you take a break? Surely when you take a break, it means you’re not working, hence being unproductive.

When I talk to other designers about taking breaks after projects, this seems to be the majority mindset on taking breaks. Otherwise, the fear of slowing down may set in. As Newton’s first law of motion suggests, objects in motion tend to stay in motion.

Taking a break is a great asset to your process as it can shake your routine, takes you out of your element so you can see problems clearer, and can even kickstart your senses and creativity.

For this, you need to focus your break time and designate your time to something in particular, not just squander it on anything and everything. If you’re being distracted by something and find that your concentration is being broken. Write that something down and assign time and attention to it. This can act as a quelling mechanism to satisfy your mind for when you return to your primary work.

For example, if you find yourself wandering to Facebook every few minutes of a project. Your mind isn’t focused on what you have to do. Assign a time and a time limit in your day that allows you to go on Facebook. This is focused, dedicated time. It allows you to feel satiated that you have spent some time with the task (distraction) and allows for easy transitioning into the next task or project.

A good practice for being productive about your time is to do this the night before. **Write down your tasks, what you need to get done, and potential distractions and dedicate a portion of time in the day to them.** This helps to free up your mind so your brain doesn't have to process what you have to do on this day, you already know what needs to be done coming into the day.

There are a couple of different types of breaks you can take;

- **Unproductive breaks.** This is time to just relax and not think of anything related to a project and nothing to do with your work.
- **Productive Breaks.** In which you step back from your primary role, and focus on a task or activity lesser than that of your primary pursuit.

Productive breaks are what a creative type is more used to. They, like me, find it hard to take a break in the first place. It allows you to productively procrastinate with another pursuit, whereby you are taking a break from your primary pursuit, but you are still satisfying your other creative outputs and still feeling productive with your time.

You can also take “Thinking Breaks”, whereby you're completely switched off, digitally and physically, just to let your mind wander. Perhaps you have a space that you like to go to in order to relax. I find that I get most of my great ideas and answers to the problems I'm working on when I'm just thinking, solitary, to myself.

Just allowing your thoughts to run wild, while keeping a notepad nearby to document them is incredibly satisfying.

Make more time for thinking. Make more time for breaks.

Breaks can help you reframe your work, with a fresh perspective and open

an avenue for you to deliver more value and greater quality to your work as a direct consequence.

Don't be misled by the thought of your downtime being an unproductive period. There isn't as much emphasis put on taking breaks because the results are intangible. You can't see the results immediately as opposed to work, but as I mentioned above, breaks are an imperative part of the creative process. And something more creatives should utilise.

“The work you do while you procrastinate is probably the work you should be doing for the rest of your life.” – Jessica Hische.

11: The Best Time To Post Your Content Online

You've done the hard work. You've researched. You've done the thinking, the work has been through your process, it's pure gold packed with valuable insight that you know your audience has been looking for (because you listen to them) and what your followers have come to expect of you and the quality of your work. **But no one knows it exists.**

Choosing the optimal time to post your content on social media is just as important as the content itself. Like the old proverb, "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, will it make a sound?". If your work is not seen, or your audience and even potential audience doesn't know about it, then it will not exist unless stumbled upon at a later stage. The work is by no means squandered, it's still as valuable as it was before it was online. But no one knows it's there.

The content will speak for itself, it's the quality that matters. Reach out to your followers, get to know their needs and what they want from you, how can you provide value to them? When you start from the beginning, you will have a small amount of followers, and that's ok, we all have to start somewhere. It may take some time for your posts to gain traction. But maybe you're doing something wrong?

You're doing your work and your followers a disservice by posting at sporadic times and inconsistent times. Post on a social media platform at a specific time, all the time. It must be instilled in your followers that this is the time that you post, and will always be the time, unless you say otherwise. It must happen from the start, from the very get-go, new followers must be inundated and brought on-board with the time that your content goes live.

Instil it in the minds of your followers / viewers / readers from the very start.

This builds consistency which leads to trust with your brand.

The following times are considered the most optimal times for posting your content online, through various social media platforms. Statistics gathered from TrackMaven;

Facebook – The most effective day to post on Facebook is Sunday. In the evening, interaction rates skyrocket.

Twitter – The most effective day to post on Twitter is Sunday. With most retweets occurring late at night between 9pm – 1am.

Blog – The most effective day to publish a blog is Saturday. Preferably in the evening.

Instagram – The most effective day to post on Instagram is Monday.

Email – The most effective day to send out a newsletter is Wednesday or Thursday, between 2pm – 5pm.

These times are just an indicator of the highest point of interactions through each platform. So utilise it as best you can, direct your audience to your content using these times. Human-beings are not robots.

You have a unique opportunity here. By being an independent artist / movie-maker / photographer etc. you control the times you want to post your content to your audience, you will quickly get to know the times when your content is being consumed by your followers, whether day or night, whatever field your pursuit may be in, because you will know what your audience wants and comes to expect off you, if not, you should.

12: Why You Need An Accountability Partner

Do you find yourself unable to commit to project or goal? It's the creative struggle, especially if a goal is long-term or you are experimenting and trying a new approach to working, or even when it's something that you really want to do, but struggle to focus on it. **This is where you need an accountability partner.**

This is a follow-up to chapter #04: Why I Stopped Caring About What Others Think. Where I talked about not caring what outsiders think of your work and your approach. They don't know your set of circumstances surrounding your work and your approach to your work, your processes and your decisions.

The only person you should listen to is an accountability partner, they are a person you open up to, you ask for their feedback and you let them into your working life, your values and approach to your work. It all comes down to your goals, how you view them, and what you want from an accountability partner.

When you let yourself and your goals down, it doesn't matter to anyone, because no one knows about them, it's different if you commit publicly, your reputation is on the line, this is a form of accountability also. It's a motivator, if you fail to turn up and deliver on the goals you set publicly, you leave people to question your ability to work, and your ability to commit to work.

When you let someone else down, it carries a much greater weight than if you let yourself down.

Make it feel like you owe a person, out of respect, you owe it to them to fol-

low through, because they are dedicating their time for you, time that would probably go to good use elsewhere. **In this case, letting yourself down, also lets your accountability partner down.**

If you want an accountability partner, you must establish your values and also your potential partners values, you don't have to be on board with every value they have, but you should understand each other, your workflow, the approach to work, the process you both have and be respectful of these values.

You need to find someone who is at a similar experience level to you in your field. You should both be at a similar progress in careers. You will know what level someone is at by their work, their website, their proficiency at working, the quality of what they do, the consistency, do they produce videos, podcasts, articles, photography, all at the same time?

Here is the important part. **An accountability partner can't be a friend.** It can't be a relative, a family member or a person you have a strong relationship with already. You have to view this as a business. Not to say that you can't be friends. But for the reasons I stated earlier, your friends won't think less of you for letting your goals down, they already hold high respect for them, even if you feel that your letting them down and wasting their time, they will still regard you and your work as high, it still doesn't carry as much weight as if it was with a person in your industry who pursues a similar passion to you or is in the same field. You don't want to waste the time of someone like this.

Go to forums, online communities. Better yet, do it in person, go to conferences, meet-ups, galleries, speaking events etc. Making a connection on a face to face, personal level is so much more valuable to both of you than by meeting a person solely online.

More than likely, these people will share the same outlook and values as you.

If you're going to a speaker / conference, it's highly possible that the majority of people are there for the same reason. **Talk to people, make connections, network, share stories, share struggles, triumphs, insight, exchange handles, check in with each other, meet up occasionally.**

Once you have an accountability partner, someone you can report to and make commitments to follow through on, this person doesn't have to know the full extent of your ins and outs, you don't have to divulge the secrets of your work. It's a meeting essentially. What are the struggles you both have? Report and check in of the commitments and record the progress you made on your current goal. Write down and define what progress should be made for the next time you check in with each other.

A couple of things to note;

- Be respectful of others time, you don't want to waste it.
- Be encouraging of that person, let them strive to do the work and back them up positively. A kind word goes a long way.

Accountability partners can be for a number of things; waking early, doing tasks on your website, writing, blog posts, anything you have a goal for. **You use them as a source to report back to on your progress with a task or goal.**

If they mess up, or don't fulfil a task. The consequences are totally at your discretion. But refer back to what I just mentioned, be positive, be encouraging. More than likely they will have the tasks done out of motivation and respect for your time, insight and feedback. Be constructive with the feedback, be positive, and try not to be subjective about an observation of their work. **Understand that they made that decision for a reason.**

Think of it this way, how bad would you feel at your meeting with this person if you didn't have your work / commitment fulfilled and the other person did? You would feel like you're wasting their time, you also run the risk of them questioning your ability to commit to a task and your ability to follow through.

It's important to have a positive motivator, think of it as, if I have this work done, it's a benefit to my site / portfolio / progress on my current goal. But also solidifies the idea that you can do something if you really work at it and put your mind to it. **Having the work done is the reward in itself.**

13: Why I Have 2 Desks In My Workspace

This isn't some silly boasting statement. I actually have 2 desks that I alternate between during my process and creation of a piece work. And that's not just in my field of work. It's open for anyone from all fields to use two desks when they are working. There is nothing more satisfying than sliding from one part of my workspace to the desk on the other end. That's because I use one desk for my digital work, and one for my analogue work.

This subject really comes down to physical vs. virtual. But both should not be seen as opposing forces working against each other, **used together, in creative conjunction, can inspire and generate truly brilliant ideas.**

On the Analogue desk: it's all about the process of the action, the touching and feeling of your own creative efforts, kneading clay, the stroke of a marker, spraying paint on canvas, the smell of raw materials. It stimulates your brain's activity, it's not just sitting at a computer screen. It's injecting fun into your work, like art class was when you were in school. **It adds a human touch in a world of increasing digitisation.**

This desk consists of nothing more than paper, pens, pencils, markers, paint, brushes, sprays etc. By rule, I allow nothing digital on it. It's where I sketch my badges and insignias before bringing them to the digital world.

Just look to artists, Javier Perez and Jon Burgerman as prime examples of physical, hand-made, fun art. It springs with personality, it maintains a human element, because it was created by hand and not published through a computer. Even if you are viewing it through a computer screen. The same can be said for other forms of art online like hand lettering.

On the Digital desk: it's all about the publishing and editing of the work. This is the part of the process where my sketches and artwork is digitized and published online. The cracks filled in and the seams polished. This is where I see the hard work come into fruition and finalised. This desk consists of my monitor, laptop, headphones, speakers, tablets, audio interface etc.

If your work only exists in a digital space, it lacks human affection.

This isn't to say that the computer isn't a valuable part of every creatives process, nor that it hasn't revolutionised how we publish and share our work. It's an incredible tool for editing your work and fine tuning. Even better for discovering new work, finding ideas, sharing ideas, reaching out to people.

There is something to be said for the feeling of physically creating something. **Engaging your senses and articulating a piece of work with your hands. The feel, the smells, the sounds of using these tools on something physical is exhilarating.**

This goes back to chapter #10, where I talked about taking breaks and getting away from the screen. Working with your hands as part of your process kickstarts your mind and reminds us that we can still create pieces of art with our hands, despite the overwhelming technological presence in, not just our working world, but our process of working.

I invite you to try using two desks as part of your workflow, if you can afford the space that is. It's a mindset to learn, be disciplined about it and keep them strictly separate. **It breeds excellent production practice to your work and idea generation.**

Think of it as a work area and a play area, on place for creating the work, and the other for editing and publishing.

14: Learn To Say No

You want more time? Are you struggling to find the time of day to do something you really want to? Do you constantly tell others (and yourself) that you are too busy and don't have time? Well, there is a way of fixing this.

At one point or another, you have allowed something into your life that together, takes up this time. Having "no time" is a problem caused by yourself, and not those around you. It was your choice to allow this into your life. It was you who decided to say yes.

Do you want more time? You have to say no.

First of all, you have to assess your values. What is truly important to you and worth taking your attention at this moment in time? Ask yourself; are you spending enough time with your partner, your friends and family, and most importantly, yourself? These take priority over all other work related activities first and foremost. Create enough margin for yourself to enjoy this time, to take on other projects, to learn something new. It's your time, you can decide what you want to do with it. **By assessing what is important to you, you can then decide to let something out of your life if it's taking up too much time.** Just say no.

We automatically aim to fill our free time with lesser, unimportant activities.

By saying no and letting something out of your life, this gives you the margin to then say yes to something greater with your time down the line. Something that could develop, something that you could grow, something you

may really enjoy, but haven't realised it yet, because you're "too busy". We all have something greater we could be doing with our time. Imagine saying no to projects, clients, frivolous pursuits and working on a greater goal, something like starting your own business.

The more you say yes the more you're taking on, which means the more your diluting the quality of your work, as your unable to focus specifically. Why would you say yes to all these things, these activities and project work if your going to be distracted by all of them. **They detract from the value of your work.**

Don't say yes to things you know you shouldn't. You will know what is important to you, and what you can take on. This is the importance of knowing your values and principles.

This is very hard for the people pleasers out there, like myself. It's hard to adjust to saying no to people, especially if you're a freelancer. The fear of putting them down and them never returning for work from you. But if by you saying no to someone really displaces them enough that they would never return to you, then that's not the type of person you want to be working with or involved in.

Be gracious. Be humbled in declining the proposition of work from someone, by simply stating that your schedule is booked up. Don't spread yourself thin. As I mentioned, the more you take on, the more you dilute the quality of your work, by being unable to dedicate the attention and time a project deserves.

It takes a mature person to say no, and a mature person with understand that. To understand what is the most important problem to solve, it takes a professional. **A professional in this case, is someone who understands their process, they have the foresight to know what they can take on with the time they have in order to produce the best quality of their work**

as they can by dedicating the appropriate amount of time to a project and solve the problem.

Saying no builds character, and boosts your moral, you're not a pushover. You're a professional to yourself and to outsiders looking in. **People will respect your decision to decline a project or piece of work.**

One of the hardest things to do as a creative, is to say no to something you would have otherwise done, something you have a genuine interest in, something you would have done otherwise, but have taken on too much at this time by saying yes to everything. A hobby, a job opportunity, a business venture with a friend perhaps.

By saying yes to everything and anything, without consulting your available time and foresight into whatever it is that you are taking on, your eliminating the chance to say yes to something that may come up that really excites you, something you want your name attached to and to be involved in, but your stuck for the time being until you drag this other thing to the finish, because you said yes to it.

You never know, by saying no, you may open the door to something you may have never know you loved.

15: You're A Business

“Wait, what? I’m a business? But I’m just one person following my passion.” This would be the typical response to such a statement. Yes, your following your passion and doing something you genuinely love, but also, take a step back, and look at your wider duties. **If you don’t start treating yourself as a business, you may lose it all.**

For instance, you’re a design freelancer who does design work for clients. On paper yes, but I’ll bet you also manage your own website and the content you choose to publish on it, you market yourself on various social media platforms, and if you work with ‘large’ enough clients, you draw up contracts for your work, and you get paid through Paypal.

How many jobs have been listed there? Enough for a small business to hire for each role. You play the part of a web developer, a marketer, an accountant, and a lawyer in this case, among other occupations depending on your process and which field of work you freelance in. It’s a lot of work, which is why being a freelancer is so difficult, and so time-consuming.

The beauty of these services is that they are (for the most part) freely available online.

Services such as ‘Paypal’ for handling how you receive payments. Apps such as ‘Shake’ and ‘Docracy’ allow you to draft and send contracts to clients easily and affordably. Along with the availability of tutorials and videos on Youtube to teach you software. **It’s never been easier to expand your knowledge and broadcast your services.**

With this cultural shift to an online presence, comes disintermediation, the cutting out of the middle man. There is now less of a reason to follow traditional distribution channels.

As an example, if you sell t-shirts from your own online store. Cutting out the middle man to you as a business, allows you to maintain control of your output in your process, meaning, you get the full cut of what you sell, you control how, when, and where you want to market yourself and deliver your content. You receive full credit, if not more for being knowledgeable in the full line of distribution and production. You own the supply chain, you choose what you want to do, and how you want to do it.

The age we live in allows us to be whatever we choose, and at an incredible pace. It allows us to each become our own business, it allows us to cut out the middle man and do it in a relatively short time frame. **The world has never been so accessible for young entrepreneurs.**

The fault with being the supply chain is that you bear the full responsibility of the entire chain. A lot more effort is required to and more knowledge of each link in the supply chain. If something goes wrong or a problem arises, it will require more of your precious time to fix that problem, time that could be going into the increasing the value or quality of your work. Which, ultimately, is the reason you are in the circumstance of selling and distributing products online. Someone values your work and high production values so much that they support you by ordering from you.

It's more important to provide quality and value in the production of your work.

There are both positives and negatives to being a business in this sense, your process is easier without them, your passing the responsibility onto a third-party to look after that particular service. But by using them, your re-

linquishing control over that service. **This also detracts from your ability to control how your audience interacts with your brand.**

You know your brand, you know what you want to control, and what you wish to broadcast, how much you want to price your goods and services at. This is what you give up by using a middleman and being on another platform, your coming under their terms. The rewards are greater if you build yourself as a business, use as little third party help as possible, and be as knowledgeable about the process as you can. You will know what you can and can't do, or maybe don't want to do. That's the beauty of accessibility.

Start seeing yourself as a business. The opportunities have never been greater and the processes easier to understand. You can build yourself into anything you want.

16: Make Your Website Your Home

Are you constantly pushing content exclusively on your social media platforms? Generating a bank of content specifically on each media site? Ask yourself, why? Then ask yourself, why aren't you pushing content from your own website?

If you're posting valuable content, images, videos, articles to a social media site without directing your audience and followers to your website, your wasting your time, and jeopardising your potential for future growth.

The key to growing your audience is to build your very own platform.

You need to guide both your current audience and future potential followers from these social media platforms, to your own home. Your home is your platform. Your platform is your website.

“Buy why? I already have hundreds if not thousands of followers on various media platforms, why would I not just stick there?” you may ask.

Your website is where you have control.

On your own website, you have complete control over every aspect of the user experience and how they interact with your brand. You tailor it to suit your preferences and provide a unique experience for visitors. This is key to building a trusting relationship with your audience, a place where your audience can come and explore your own quality content, exactly how you want them to.

On social media platforms, users are given the same look and style as every other user on the platform, Facebook pages look the same as everyone else, the same as Twitter, Instagram etc. How the user experiences and interacts with something is the same for everyone. There is nothing unique to the user experience with your brand on social media.

Social media platforms are a tool. Each have their own strengths, If one is visually appealing, use this and create rich imagery to take advantage of what the platform has to offer in order to broadcast your content.

Direct the user to your website at every opportunity. Bring them to your home. Give them a reason to stay.

Create a home full of value, make the user grateful that they visited and give them a reason to come back. Invest in your home.

You can't create a unique experience on someone else's platform, you're bound by their technical limitations and design. But you can do what you want in your own home. Building your own platform is crucial vs. social media in terms of longevity. **At any time social media platforms can change how they operate** (Facebook charging for ads as an example), you can't control this.

The bigger issue being that at any time a social media platform can become irrelevant. If you have spent your time building your content and interactions around this platform and suddenly disappears, where will you find yourself then?

What good is your presence when you don't even have one?

Build your site now, send your audience there, give them a reason for going there. Give them a reason to stay there. Give them a reason to come back.

17: Why You Shouldn't Worry About Competitors

We all struggle with the thought of competitors in our respective field. In terms of design, the fear that there is only so many clients to go around. That there is always another designer lurking in the shadows just ready to undercut your price. That they are the ones getting the jobs, getting the exposure, growing their services and becoming a success in your field, all the while you are left in the dust twiddling your thumbs.

But this isn't really the case. There is no one clipping at your heels waiting for you to trip up so they can have a shot at the glory.

In reality, if there is no competition, people wouldn't value your service because there is nothing to compare it to.

Competition in a field is a form of validation that there is a market for the product or service. What you should fear is pursuing a field where there is no competition. Now that's not always the case, but it's a tried and tested indicator that there is a demand for a particular product or service.

It's an opportunity to display the unique qualities on offer from your own service, to show what you offer is valuable.

Competition is a mindset, it's about how you view the other professionals that work in your industry. You can choose to view them as detracting from potential profit and exposure. **Or you can view them as a potential for networking and an opportunity for collaboration.**

Being in the design industry, I can say the latter is more beneficial to your

brand, client base, exposure, and the quality of your service.

Business gets passed around. Get to know people in your field, become friends and network with others in your industry. You will begin to find that your contacts list will grow substantially the more you adopt this mentality. **Someone in your network will have a contact that will one day be invaluable to your brand and open the door to a new opportunity that you never had before.**

There's an abundance of work. The benefits of networking with your competition far outweigh the 'hermit crab' mentality in your industry.

You have something unique to offer. You can do something that no one else can. This is the importance of finding your niche in the market. The work you choose to broadcast will display your own unique value.

- Network with other professionals in your field.
- There's always going to be clients.
- Convey the unique value you offer to attract future clients.

Ask yourself; would you hire you?

18: The Importance of Curating Your Output

We all have multiple passions and we are all good at multiple pursuits. One of the problems is that we want to follow all of these avenues at the same time. We want to show the world that we possess skills in many different artistic expressions. This counteracts the practice of curating your work. When I say curate your work, I mean what you broadcast to the world, what you share online.

The internet allows pursuing a hobby, interest or passion quite easily. The accessibility of knowledge needed to pursue an artistic expression is gained relatively quickly through a few simple Google searches. What takes your skill further is your willingness to pursue that avenue, work hard at it and practice to make it yours. **You're not unique. Anybody, can do anything, anytime they want.**

What separates you from being 'just anybody', is your willingness to become associated to with a particular skill or trade. This is why you need to curate what you share online.

This also goes back to chapter #9: Are You A Jack Of All Trades? Where I talked about pursuing one goal at a time, if not, your diluting the quality of the output of your other passions because your attempting to juggle them all, and not dedicating time to focus on one pursuit.

By curating just one passion, you're developing a strong association to that passion.

People cannot fathom the vast complexities of each individual they follow

online. This is something you will have to get over. Yes, we're all good at many skills and have a lot of hobbies. People are going to pigeon-hole you, they need to put you into a box in order to understand and label you so they can structure what they want to see online. This is your opportunity to write the label for them, shape the box they put you in. **This happens by curating your work. This is how you will grow your audience.**

Do you want to be known as a marine photographer, or nothing at all? Because people can't process the complexities of a marine photographing, BMX-biking, guitar-playing, programmer.

The vast majority of people's Facebook and Twitter is just a stream of conscious thought. It's in the moment, what they are doing then and there. There is no structure, just sporadic jumping back and forth between pursuits, what they are thinking, pictures of recent purchases or opinions on unrelated topics.

If this is you, and you're thinking, "why can't I grow my audience?", this is why. When you're starting out and you have no followers or an audience and no one knows your name, how are you going to grow if no one knows what you do? You need to pick something you love, and broadcast only that.

If you want to be known for something, you have to curate what you share.

This is one of the main reasons you grow your audience and followers. **Be known for one of your passions or you'll be known for none of them.** You attract what you project. Which is all the more reason to focus on one passion and broadcast it. Let the work speak for itself. Selectively curating what you project gets you on the ladder (of that skill or profession) and quality shoots you up it, in terms of association and audience appreciation.

“If you want to be noticed, you have to subjectively project the thing you want to be known for.” – Seanwes

When you have so many pursuits being broadcasted online, no one pursuit is distinguished from the others, which means no one pursuit can be consumed and processed. Which creates noise, and no one wants to follow noise. You need to narrow your focus so people know what your all about. Your establishing yourself as a professional, as an expert in the field, you will be respected for that. This is how you build an audience.

But you're not caged into this one passion, there is room to manoeuvre. **You don't have to do this one thing for the rest of your life. You're not stuck.**

Once you have established yourself as a professional at that pursuit, people will remember that as you move on to the next pursuit, even if in a different field. Which is great news for those of us who fear being locked in this one thing for the rest of our life. Which, again, lends itself back to chapter #9.

If you choose to move on to the next passion, you have the social proof and a proven track record from previous pursuits to carry over followers from that pursuit, because you have established your credibility and hard work already. People know what you can do, and your capacity to work because you were so successful in past pursuits.

Curate your output. Be noticed. Build an audience.

19: Branding a Business Name Vs. a Personal Name

Should I use my personal name, or should I use a business name for my brand? A question worthy of thought as to how you wish to be known, and what you wish to be associated with in both the short and long-term identity of your brand.

Do you plan to remain a solo entrepreneur? Someone who is going to be part of the brand on a personal level? Naming your brand by a personal name carries with it the implication of a personal touch, and the customer will get the impression that one person is invested in the brand, both with their time and financial involvement. The output of work is that of a solo effort. There is a face to the brand, and that's where it ends, there is no one else behind it. What you see is what you get.

If you wish to be intentionally involved, brand yourself with a personal name.

At some stage down the line you may outgrow your output, where you need to outsource your work. The brand may evolve to encompass other people. Disney for example. The name that was once personal, transcends into one that is multi-personal.

Customers love stories, and being a personal brand is a great way to attract an audience with tales of overcoming difficult obstacles on your path to success. They perceive the personal name to be just one person, working extremely hard at their dream, and this is very rewarding in the long run. People love an underdog story. A story of starting from scratch and working hard to achieve your goals and getting where you want to be. Personal name brands

are rewarding in the long run, where you can create a stronger connection to your audience.

A business name on the other hand, will find it harder to connect with their audience on a more human level, due to the nature of storytelling being a personal affair. Of course businesses can tell stories but it's more removed from the emotive aspect. Coming from a business, it feels like more of a facade, we know there is a person behind the story, but the use of a business name builds up a wall and feels almost robotic which makes it harder for consumers to accept and become invested in a brand on a more personal level. This is why businesses have mascots. In an attempt to inject a personal element and transcend that wall.

Personal names require you to think about how much you want to be involved and to what level.

So you have your name, built up a following and established a bit of a reputation. So when should a new project fall under the same name umbrella, and when should you branch off under a different name or alias?

As I mentioned in chapter #18, it's much easier to carry over the trust in your followers to your new venture. This is why celebrities branch into new fields to create a fashion line or fragrances etc. **Because their name accompanies an already established reputation and quality factor, just by association alone.**

A Personal name evolves, there is room to pivot. It's like a living breathing person. You are what you project. A business name will have a harder time evolving into something new if it is too industry specific. For example a name like "Acoustic Guy" who covers acoustic versions of pop songs on Youtube, something that's so specific, will get immediate attention from people looking for this exact outlet. But the name will run into problems further down the

line and will find it harder to build a trust with people if he has moved on to electronic music , and accompanies that under the same umbrella (name).

It's all about the long-term vs. short-term;

Short Term: Business Name. You will gain a large initial growth, will be easy to search for online, and people instantly know what they are getting. But will find it harder to connect with people on a personal level, and (depending on the name) may only be able to take one creative direction.

Long Term: Personal Name. Harder initially to get started, low-level of search optimisation (depending if you are niche enough), but easier to build connections and establish relationships with your followers. Easier to evolve into another artistic expression.

People know what they are looking for and will know immediately if you are for them.

Your brand is all about how people view you. You're either actively shaping that, or you're not.

20: The Fear of Failing

Does the thought of failure paralyse your motivation and drive to pursue your passion? Maybe so much so that you don't even want to begin down the road towards your goal or dream? This is a common perception among freelancers and entrepreneurs. Is it the hard work you're afraid of, or the looming fear of failing? Investing so much time and effort, even financially, for something to not work out the way you envisioned at the beginning, can be heartbreaking and a setback. But perhaps not.

The worst thing you can do is to never even try at all.

The challenge is to identify, objectively, what scenarios can occur when you fail. It's not the idea of failing that scares people, but the result of the failure. It's important to analyse what the results of the failure may be and what failure could possibly exist, and what you could do to prepare for those risks if such a failure would ever occur.

Identify and list what the potential pitfalls may be along the way to your goal, and put yourself in a scenario where you come out on the other end of the failure, this will allow you to visualise yourself after the worst case scenario to prevent the failure from becoming a dead-end and completely discouraging you on your path to pursuing your goal.

The more you plan in advance and identify what (obvious) failures may arise if something goes wrong, and what they mean to you, the easier it will be to overcome these intermediate failures.

The key to continuing on your path to your goal is controlling how you

react to the result of a failure.

Success will ultimately bring intermediate failure on its path. Certain aspects of the path may be out of your control and may bring about failure, which can be scary when so much is on the line, depending on how much you've risked.

But it's your response to failing which will set you on the right course to success again.

Success and failure are attitudes.

Failures are a golden opportunity to better yourself and your process. From something going wrong, you gain the knowledge and experience to carry forward with you, which can also apply to many aspects of your creative output and artistic expressions in the future.

You get to continue on the path knowing something you didn't before you started. Something which may be key to your process and even change your outlook on your work.

You can read about it all day, but you will never know until you actually experience it for yourself.

Go forth, put yourself at risk. It can only better you and your work in the long run.

21: How To Get The Most From Your Mornings

As a creator, the first thing you should be doing in the morning, is producing content, not consuming it.

It's easy to scroll through endless feeds in the morning until you reach that point where you must do something out of necessity ie, go to your day job. This has become our default state. In the morning, your brain is clear and fully rested to start a productive task. If you don't, you squander the rest that your brain accrued that night, forcing it to consuming more information on top of even more information from your work day, with newsfeeds, emails, notifications, meetings etc.

The morning is the time of the day when your brain operates at its clearest and most functional.

I'm an avid fan of the early bird mentality, and have devised a few methods and tips to help myself be the most productive at this time of day;

Plan – Plan what you have to do the night before you aim to get up early. Planning is a great method to gaining clarity and peace of mind. When you know what needs to be done, you can jump straight into that task without having to figure out what the most important task is when you wake up, thus burning time and precious brain power in flustering yourself over what to do first. To be specific, create a list. **List the most important thing that needs to be done first.** Even if it's the hardest, you're more likely to do it with a fresh mind. It's easier to get out of bed when you know what needs to be done.

Lists are also great, psychologically, as they are a tool for creating a sense of

achievement, having just completed a minor goal from said list.

Also, create a list of distractions, then when you think of one while you're in the process of working, you can allocate time to the distraction during a break, thus satiating that distraction.

Watch your time – keep a log of your time, how long you spend doing a task, how long you take a break for, how long you pander to a distraction, learning a new skill etc. Whatever you're doing in the morning, keep a journal and document the time. **Logging your time and keeping a journal are a great way of keeping you accountable of your output and what you are really getting done.**

Constantly ask yourself; Is there something more important I could be doing with my time? If there is, why aren't you doing that? Know how you're spending your time.

Set yourself a goal – Create a goal exclusively for that time in the morning. This creates a sense of duty and importance. Something that you can only do at this time. If it's a task that you also work at in the later hours of the evening, you won't be held as accountable to the morning hours and will be easier to say no to the task as it can be pushed back until later.

Even the smallest goals take you closer to success.

Success is knowing that small things done over time carry great weight. It's about making the most with the time you have.

“If it has to happen, then it has to happen first” – Laura Vanderkam

22: The Problem With Being a Young Freelancer

Of course there are many problems with being a freelancer, each individual has problems under their own set of circumstances. But I'm talking about the larger picture. How freelancing is viewed as from outside of being a freelancer. A general problem that affects young freelancers and entrepreneurs looking for work in any type of field.

The problem is experience.

Are you too young to be taken seriously in your field? Experience is dictated by big businesses / studios etc. as a means of entry. It can work both with you and against you in both objective and subjective ways. When it comes to great work, there is an outside perception of old & wise vs. youthful talent.

In a day job sense, there is a stigma associated to someone who is younger compared to someone who is older when it comes to hiring for a position. This also transcends to freelancing. Someone who is younger may not have the same experience levels as someone who is older and in the same field. As its perceived that they have not been in the industry for as long and may not have been exposed to as many situations and circumstances as an older person who has spent more time in that industry.

When you're younger, there can be more room to experiment, to get things wrong and pick back up without much consequence to your time and expenses etc. **You're not expected to know everything.**

When your older, there is less of this freedom, as there is a quality expectation that comes with age. Freedom is exchanged for responsibility.

It's going to be difficult, and realistically, an uphill struggle. With youth, (generally) comes inexperience. Although someone who is young may be displaying an incredible talent for someone of that age, since they are 10 years lesser of someone with 10 extra years of experience, the work may be discredited by outside sources, as just youthful talent and with no industry knowledge of the processes and techniques of creating the work.

No matter what field it's in, experience can be applied across many industries, and not just in a professional sense, but in life experiences as well. Realistically, if you're 18, just out of school, you will not have experienced, nor had the chance to experience, certain circumstances and situations in life that build insight and wisdom in a person. This is all taken into consideration, even if subconsciously, by the person who is willing to hire you.

They want to know if you are worth investing in. You need to prove it.

Regardless of external life experiences, ultimately, the key definition to your portfolio, is your professional experience. What have you done? What haven't you done? What circumstances have you been involved in? What problems did you face? Most importantly, what problems did you solve?

These are the questions you need to ask yourself when displaying your work. If you're worried about a thin portfolio, then start now. If you're worried about not having as much experience as someone 10 years older than you, start now. You need to publicly demonstrate your ability to work and solve problems. It's essential, in order for others to fathom and understand you and your process.

Be consistent, show up. Document your work and create case studies after completing a project that will showcase your ability to identify problems and the what, why, and how you solved them.

Stick to your values. Maintain high quality. Let your work speak for itself.

23: Surround Yourself With Success

Not all people aspire to be successful. There are those that are successful, those that aren't successful and want to be, and those that aren't successful and don't want to be. If you aspire to be successful, but aren't yet, you need to surround yourself with successful people. Success is a mindset that you need to be around in order for it to rub off onto you.

Success is a way of thinking.

You may not have the close contacts to be around an outwardly successful person at first. Where you should start, is to be around someone with this mindset who you know, follow them online, reach out to them, interact with their work, send them an email, support their work, build a relationship online. **A successful person is applicably disciplined at what they do and know where they want to be.**

Successful people don't waste their time, nor others for that matter.

Success means different things for different people. There is a common misconception which you see online, perpetuated by social media sites in particular, that success is how much you make, or how many followers you have etc. But, in a more definitive sense, it means, "have I achieved what I set out to achieve?" or "have I reached my goal?"

What I mean by success as a mindset is one that is able to identify priorities, someone who is/will be successful, will know when to make sacrifices, and will be discipline in knowing what is important and what needs to get done.

Success is something that can be learned.

If you don't know anyone with a successful mindset in your close circle of friends, you may need to surround yourself success online at first, as I mentioned above. **Be inspired, be influenced, allow as much success in as it will take to keep you motivated to reach your goal.**

People are driven by successful people, they want what they have.

You need to hang out with intellectually stimulating people, someone who will both challenge you, and encourage you. But what if I'm not close to those types of people? Then go out of your way to find them. Conferences, talks, meet ups, galleries. **Go to places that attract people of a similar mindset.**

When you find that person and make a connection with them, make sure they are on a similar level to you. What I mean is, make sure they are on the same step on the ladder of progression, in or around. If this person is in the same field, or even if they are not, and is as far in their career as you are, it's a mutually beneficial relationship, since you are both at the same step, progressively, you can scale together, and learn skills from one another.

If you find yourself approaching someone on a much higher level than you, they are ahead of you in terms of progression in their career, insight, wisdom, their process, what to do in their field, contacts in their field, how to get thing done quickest, and the steps that got them there. They are passed you and have experienced more, they have worked harder than you.

This is all extremely valuable information. So valuable in fact, that it must be compensated for in exchange for the amount of what that information is worth, not just for you, but for the person indulging the information.

Now, the context has changed, you are no longer positioned side-by-side,

mutually, with a successful minded person, you are under them, in a position seeking mentorship, this requires compensation for their time and advice.

Never put someone who is above you in a position where you are not compensating them for their time. To do so is insulting.

If you are looking up to a successful person, especially online, asking them for their time, more than likely, there are others doing the same. If you happen to get their attention, make sure you can adequately compensate their time, offering to discuss for coffee, is the equivalent of saying, I'll pay you €3 for your time. But most importantly, make sure you ask the right questions.

This is why it's easier to find a person with a successful mindset on the same level as you. Someone who you don't have to compensate, you can communicate easily, and grow together. A friend.

Ask yourself; are you the type of person that people would seek for advice? What step on the ladder are you at right now?

Always aim to climb the ladder.

24: The Difference Between Feedback & Criticism

Do you seek to hear about your work from other people; feedback, criticism, opinions, advice? But sometimes you find it hard to swallow the information, that you really want to build upon and grow your work in a mature way. Well, I'm here to tell you that there is a difference between certain types of information that people can give to you about your work. There are only two types that you should concern yourself with from outside sources, feedback and criticism.

This is a common misconception, but **there is no such thing as constructive criticism. Criticism is finding fault with your work.**

The difference is how the messages are delivered and interpreted by you. Feedback doesn't deconstruct your work, it should help to improve some part about your process or product as you progress and practice it in future work.

Feedback is for the future, Criticism is for the past.

Feedback evaluates your work positively, and can come from people who are closer to you and your work, someone who understands and values your process / ideals / goals, but someone who is also knowledgeable about the subject or profession, while have a greater weight to their voice.

Criticism is akin to an opinion, and an opinion is a view about a particular subject matter, and is entirely subjective. There are no winners when it comes to opinions.

This is something you should remember, an opinion is based on situational or circumstantial life events surrounding a person and that view may be different to yours.

Remember that, as a professional in your field, you have made a decision that you believe solves the problem presented to you, objectively, with the best possible solution. **You have your process and knowledge to back it up. So always be confident in your work.**

When is it ever a good experience when someone approaches you and asks “do you mind if I give you some constructive criticism?”

Criticism makes you feel defeated, instills a sense of self-doubt, and ultimately demotivates you. If a person asks you, “Can I give you feedback”. People will say ‘feedback’ because it doesn’t sound as negative as criticism, when really, if someone is asking to give their voice about your work, they are just preparing you. **Giving you a warning that they are about to deconstruct your work and process. This is criticism.**

When you are part of a small, professional community or share your work with close professional friends and colleagues, most of the time they will aim to offer helpful information regarding your work.

Likewise, if someone is asking you for your feedback on their work. Consider your delivery of this information, what started out as objective feedback may become subjective criticism of the work, it’s a delicate subject and must be handled thoughtfully and maturely.

Feedback is a constructive method to provide insight and the best practice. It is something you as a professional should seek from another professional.

You may see “I would have done...”, or ‘I would have used...” from commenters on social media outlets when following some of your favourite artists and musicians. But remember, these people are not part of the process, they may even know little about the person ‘behind the art’. They are following the same artist as you for a reason. **This person is a professional, and has made the decision in their work for a reason.**

You will notice online that the more popular an artist becomes, the more people they attract, which means the more opinions get voiced, which means, the more arguments that occur from people who don’t agree.

No one should willingly pass on their opinion on your work without you asking for it. The same way you should never voice your opinion on someones work without them asking for it.

To ask for feedback is a sign of maturity and confidence in you and your work. You don’t always have to seek feedback, but to seek it, is to strive to add value to your future work and process, and could help you discover a new direction in your profession.

You learn as you grow and you grow as you learn.

25: When Should I Give Advice?

Following on from the previous chapter on the topic of feedback and criticism, it feels natural to lead into the topic of contributing advice to someone who has asked for it. Spoiler alert; **you should only give advice when you're an established professional with a proven track record of solving problems when you have been asked to.**

The same applies from when I discussed giving feedback. Only do it when you have been approached.

Being approached and asked for advice is not something you should take light-heartedly. That person has asked you for a reason, they value your knowledge and expertise in that particular area they are asking about and believe that your input surrounding their current situation to be worthwhile, otherwise they wouldn't have asked at all.

Firstly; you must imagine yourself in their current circumstance. What the potential results could be for them in whichever direction they choose to go in and determine if this is what they truly want.

Although, speaking from experience can be misleading. As even if you explain what you did and how it worked for you, step for step, **their situation is not going to be the same as yours.**

Like working on a project, your advice aims to solve a problem, where you should begin by deducing all of the current directions that the project can go in down to just one, to solve the problem with the best possible solution, tailored specifically to that client. See the connection?

This is how a professional would approach a project to start with. By the time people (followers /listeners /readers) ask you for advice, you would have established your knowledge in a particular field and have proven your track record through your work and portfolio, otherwise why would they come to you in the first place.

You have already established your credibility before people come to you.

More than likely, the advice received through followers online will be surrounding your process, streamlining, something you have created or shared publicly, something on offer. It will be information that you have conceived or honed, something that will make the askers life easier.

But beware of misinformed information regarding others circumstances, it may do more harm than good and cause setbacks. It may not work for them as it did for you.

Know your role when giving advice. Is the person who is asking a follower, are they loyal to you and your brand? Do they interact with you online (comments /tweets etc.), have they bought merchandise or products from you in the past? Are they subscribed to your mailing list, podcasts or videos?

All of these are key indicators of loyal customers /followers.

Or is the person a blow in, someone who simply stumbled upon your work for the first time, liked what they seen and wants to leech valuable information from you to the benefit of only themselves without offering some sort of compensation (of sorts).

The wording that is used in the asking parties' message is just as important as the asker. Are they just in it for a quick buck, or are they genuinely trying

to better themselves and their process for the good of others experiences?

Remember, people will want your advice for a reason, you're a professional, from whom people seek something you have that they don't, this is valuable.

Evaluate people's position, circumstance, and loyalty before fabricating advice to provide. Their circumstance will be different to yours.

Remain useful, remain relevant, remain pragmatic.

26: Identifying and Dealing With Trolling

This is one of the more pointless tasks you're going to encounter in your professional career and even when you're doing what you love, posting and publishing your work online, getting exposure, and really connecting with people.

The bigger you become and the more people you reach with your work, means the more people you become exposed to, and that also means the more of the wrong kind of people you're going to be exposed to.

It's easier to be deconstructive than to be constructive.

The more attention your work receives online and the more people it's exposed to, the more likely it is that a very small, minute, yet vocal, amount of people won't agree with your views or your approach to your work. This escalates quickly if you receive a spike in success and suddenly find yourself in the spotlight after being mentioned in a popular website article or retweeted by someone with a lot of influence and reach.

A spike in success is a surefire way of attracting trolls.

Trolls will try to find a way to devalue your work and efforts in a bid to justify why they are unsuccessful or for their jealousy in not being in the spotlight. They envy you for being in a 'better' position than they are.

Of course it's perfectly justifiable for people to question, disagree and challenge your views, but there is a difference between this and someone being deconstructive just for the sake of it.

It's the wrong people who don't like to see others being successful, and that's fine, because they aren't the type of people you are trying to resonate and connect with. The person who understands you and your brand will also identify these trolls. **You should pay more attention to the people who are admiring your work than to the vocal minority that aren't.**

For every 1 detractor, you have 100 silent admirers.

Focus on your audience who are on board with you, who are influenced by your work and your values, and not the ones who are picking up on and pointing out your mistakes just to be mean. You're going to make mistakes, so be transparent, iterate it in public and let people know, this shows your honesty to people. **People like a human element when dealing with those who they admire and follow online.** It builds trust, and people will like you for that.

The number one way of dealing with trolls is also the classic; don't feed it. This will be a true test of endurance and of your professionalism. This is your brand and business, your name is only ever at stake when it comes to interacting with trolls. You have no idea how fast your credibility will go from hero to zero if you start flaming back and forth on a comments/discussion board.

You will have to realise that some people aren't going to like your work, they have different views, experiences and situations, these are all great, and in the right environment, can promote a healthy discussion and good debate about certain topics and approaches to ideas and work. **But you can't please everyone.**

Trolls are a good indicator that your growing your audience and that your work is being noticed. Embrace it, remain professional, your already and influencer to someone, even if you don't know it.

27: What If I'm Not Good Enough?

Good enough to what? What is 'good enough' in your mind, and what are you comparing yourself to in order to construct this question? Part of this problem is comparing yourself and your ability to other people's work, which is another topic entirely, and one I will cover in a future post.

If you immerse yourself in a lot of brilliant work from artists on instagram and dribbble etc., they can be an incredibly inspiring presence, but you're setting the standard for your work that follows, as you aim to emulate that brilliance, the production value, the quality, the skill and technique, either consciously or subconsciously.

This can lead to a saturation of content that drowns your creative spark and drive to create work on the back of what was originally meant to be inspiring. **You reach a point where you doubt your own ability so much that you don't want to continue, or even start in the first place.**

Use this brilliant work as a motivator, something that drives you and something to strive for, for future you. Expose yourself to enough content to become motivated, but not enough so that it drowns your spark.

Too many people see the finished product on social media and from artists portfolios, but never comprehend the difficulty it took the artist to get there, the sacrifices, the long hours and deliberate practice they put in to better themselves at their skill and become an expert. **People want the final result, without the hard work.**

Seeing the brilliance on display can lead to people copying artists work. Never

copy. **Copying is the lowest form of flattery.** Something an artist worked hard on to create and for someone to take that work and pass it off as their own is not something that is respectable by professionals. It's easy to see when an artist has just copied work from elsewhere.

Immerse yourself in great work, be inspired, get ideas, and absorb as much as you can from different sources before coming back at a later time without the source material and practice your skill. **This way you develop your own personal style, and look and feel.**

Hard work will always beat talent, and for the most part, you don't become talented at something by doing nothing. If you believe someone to be a natural talent, in actual fact, they have worked hard at their skill and dedicated a lot of time to it to purposely learn it and become better. **You can't have talent without hard work.**

Don't compare your skill to someone else's, you can never know the circumstances that surround them and the situation they are or were in to become great at what they do. Focus on your own skills, your own passion and shift your attention to deliberately practicing at becoming better at that skill. Expose yourself to enough content to become inspired, but not enough that it kills your passion.

Be a creator, not a consumer. The vast majority of the work is a consumer, if you're creating content, you're already unique. Never be afraid of hard work. **By putting in the hard work and investing time in a skill, you will discover if you truly loved it or if it was the idea of it that you loved. You have to love the act of doing it.**

By taking the time out to discover if something is your true passion, you may discover other avenues that you never knew you liked, but would have never known if you hadn't put in the hard work and took the risk from the start.

28: How To Be Driven

Are you the type of person that has a get-up-and-go attitude? Can you be persistent with your work and progress? Are you able to act on motivation and inspiration at a whim? Or do you struggle to find that drive to begin with?

Inspiration means nothing if you don't act on it.

Even if you have that drive to begin with, can you persist with it long enough to see your long-term goals through? Eventually, you're going to burn out. It will happen so prepare for it and be mindful.

Circumstances and expectations change, new ideas form, and this takes your mind off your main goal, and you begin to question your motive for beginning, which is also a good thing. You need to keep checking how your goals and reality are aligning, and if you're truly enjoying the direction you're going in.

Focus on what is most important to you.

The tendency now is to get caught up in an immediate gratification of 'likes' and 'shares' online. **A short term solution to a long-term problem.** Sharing half-finished work on Facebook and Instagram without the willingness to shut-in, start, progress and finish a full project without stopping and checking what people think of your half-finished work. You will grow quicker, with a greater reception to a full piece of finished work.

Create a drive by constraining yourself, set limits on our work, a time limit, use certain instruments, certain colours or techniques. Use this to generate drive, to think outside the box. **Thinking outside the box is creativity.**

You can't solely rely on a creative spark, that rush you get when creating something new, something you're trying out for the first time, the excitement of a new venture and different process. When the spark runs out (which it will) regardless if this is your passion or not, exercising limitations is a good technique to get your mind flowing in your work.

You need to get into a mindset of, "This is what I do", so you need to show up and do it. If you start off driven, you're eventually going to run into a wall. You will reach a point where you haven't got that spark and pure energy and enthusiasm to draw from to fuel your drive for this particular field.

An accountability partner is good for developing a drive to start and finish a project or piece of work. It's someone who is going to motivate you to show up, do the work and finish it. Otherwise it's to let not just you down but them too, as they have invested their time and effort in showing up to help you. They are useful for people who have drive, and those who do not.

Curate your social feeds. Who you follow online is just as important as the people who surround you in your real life. There has never been more noise in the world, in both physical and digital, as there is at this moment in time. If you're looking for drive, start with this approach. **Unfollow everything that creates noise, everything that isn't generating value to you, everything that isn't going to motivate and inspire you.**

Start a fresh slate of Twitter and Instagram. Ask yourself if this person or brand is worth your time and attention? Ask yourself if it's going to motivate you to create?

Even in real life, who are you surrounding yourself with? Are they creatives? Are they interesting? Do they create good, valuable content? Your close friends. Do they inspire and push you, do they challenge you?

You may find that you are just in a passing season of your work where you're feeling unsure. So embrace it, ask questions about your motives, keep checking in on yourself and reevaluate your goals to see if you are still going in the direction you want to be.

29: The Creative's Guide To Getting Stuff Done

After last weeks post about finding your drive and how to keep it, once you have the drive, you need to know what to do with it. Drive can be a hard source to come across frequently, so when you have it, use it to maximise your output and productivity. Know which direction to go in, how to apply it effectively, and just get stuff done.

“Be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work.” – Gustave Flaubert.

- KEEP A NOTEBOOK.

Post-its, logbooks, diaries, to-do lists, if you don't keep at least one of these in your life to date, then start immediately. You need to be able to chart your progress and successes, what projects you worked on, what you did, and what you accomplished, on a daily basis. Its easier than you think to keep a daily log of stuff you have done. After time, you feel obliged to keep working on a daily basis, just to fill the daily entry.

I prefer physical copies of my logs, but now there is no excuse for anyone not to have a daily diary. Apps such as Wunderlist, Evernote, Skitch, Memoir, Notability and Clear make it easier than ever to write down your thoughts. All these apps and their ability to sync with your phone means you will never be without the opportunity to document your daily activities. **You never know when an idea may strike so don't make excuses. Make more things.**

- SET TIME LIMITS.

Like I mentioned in chapter #6, setting time limits allows you to think creatively to solve a problem to a deadline, best practiced on your own personal work, limits inspire you to come up with a solution under pressure of a limited amount of time. **Honing this skill can see you maximise your output and exercise critical thinking under pressure.** Read more on setting limits for yourself in this chapter.

- STAY OUT OF DEBT.

An important point that, you will be surprised to hear, not many people know how to do. Our world is very much based on a consumer culture. Fancy new gadgets, expensive software, high-powered computers, shiny professional cameras. You need to learn how to say no. Control your desire for new, expensive tech, regular holidays, lavish daily coffees. **Live within your means.**

If you find yourself spiralling out of control in a sea of debt, your work will suffer. You will take on any client for work, regardless of pay, this is not what you want if you wish to grow your business or brand. Your living in scarcity. **Freedom from financial stress is one of the most satisfying lifestyle choices you will ever make.**

- GET A DAY JOB.

This is the foundation to building your own business and brand, you need to cover your bases from the beginning, and having a day job gives you the money you need to do so. **Earn a living by day, build your future by night.**

A day job is good for your mind too. Meeting new people, having different tasks to challenge you and broaden your skill set along with creating a routine. Other people you work with will share stories, can inspire you, and can

learn from them. Use the day job for momentum, something you can swing straight into when you come home and jump into working on your passion. **It's going to take up most of your time unfortunately, but its essential in order to build what you can call your day job in the future.**

- TAKE CARE OF YOUR HEALTH.

Something that is probably obvious, but again, by creating a cycle of working day job to working on passion at night to sleeping, you may forget what is ultimately the most important facet of your life, your health. Stay healthy, don't forget to take a break from the cocoon that you have built for yourself. Splash out every now and then. **Treat yourself. Spend time with your family and friends.**

Your health is your wealth. So eat breakfast, go for walks, visit the gym, explore your city or countryside, sleep!

30: Why You Need To Start Writing

We live in an age where content is king. With the aim to provide as much value as possible from the medium in which we choose to post. There is so much content and noise out there as it stands, we constantly scroll through endless reams of audio, video and images. To get someones attention for more than 5 seconds is special.

What you need to aim for now, is to keep their attention.

At the time of writing this, the social media platform with the most user engagement is Instagram, and it's only increasing. Images are more prevalent now than they ever have been. The ease and accessibility to find visually engaging images makes Instagram the 'go-to' for big brands and also, independent artists. It's a great time to be a designers, photographer, painter, or any pursuit which creates visual work, as engagement with images has never been higher. This trend is set to continue.

That's great and all, but what happens after you get the 'likes'/'favourites' on your images? Most likely nothing.

This is because the number one app (at the time of writing this; Instagram) concerning engagement, does not cater very well to links, ie. Linking to work/portfolio/external sites is quite awkward and clunky. So what can you do to not only get noticed, but also start to build an audience?

You need to start writing.

When you write and publish your wiring to your website, you are embedding

these words and optimising on appearing higher in search engines. **People aren't searching with images online, they are searching with words.**

Words are going to rank higher in search engines. Specific words, buzzwords, niche words, these are what people search for and this is what triggers Google, Bing etc. But that's not to say that if you write a blog post containing a list of buzzwords you will rank higher in search engines. You have to provide value. People who have the same problem are searching for a solution and some insight into solving the problem, and people will return if you constantly solve problems and provide this sort of value.

You don't have to be a Pulitzer prize-winning author and writer in order to write. **Don't use your brain as storage, get your ideas out.** Even if you don't know what to write about, start anyway, the more you write, the more you discover what you want to say. **The more you write about that topic, the more refined it becomes, your writing always evolves.**

Writing is a way of establishing yourself as a professional and an expert. If someone scrolls through your social media feed and discovers some logos you designed and wishes to pursue what they liked to your website, only to find a few images on your site with no description, no insight, or no story to them, people will be disappointed. **There is nothing else to engage with, nothing to keep their attention.**

Always ask yourself;

- What's going to keep someone engaged on my website?
- Have I got enough content to keep someone on my website for 1 hour?
- What's going to get them there?

Writing establishes your personality, views, values, and your goals and aspirations. It's your very own digital voice, without being a voice. If you create

a great piece of work, music, painting, photography, baking, DIY. People are going to want to know how you create your work, they want to know your process, walk-through, inspirations, how-to's, tools etc. They will want to know you.

If you can provide these in a valuable way that people want. This is how you build an audience.

Don't wait to find out what you want to write. Don't be afraid to share what you think is useless information, or something you think is too niche. The more niche the better. If you have solved/discovered/made something but think it is too niche, someone, somewhere, is having the same problem and is going to want to hear about it.

Do yourself and favour. Start writing.

31: Dedicate Your Time To Focus And Limit Distraction

Our lives are full of distractions. Everywhere we go, everything we do, mundane or otherwise, is surrounded by distraction. The explosion of the smart-phone era into society has catapulted more distractions than ever right into arms reach. The world's knowledge can be accessed through our pocket. An amazing feat of humankind and it's up to us to take advantage of the opportunities presented to us in this way. To squander them, is to be distracted. The possibilities of what you can do are endless, but you need to focus on the most important thing to you right now.

Like I mentioned in chapter 1, it all starts with waking up early and tackling your most important tasks first. At night, your brain is fatigued with processing the information of the day. This encumbering makes it harder to get going on the task at hand, making distractions more prevalent. Make a list the evening before the morning you wake early, **write down the most important tasks that need to be completed and tackle those first in the morning.**

When you wake up before the world starts waking and begin working, the world seems quieter. The emails, tweets et al. have not started flowing yet. There isn't as many people online to offer distractions. **It's essentially a block of free time you carve out of the day free from the online world.** If you get work completed before the world starts waking, then you still have the rest of the day left, knowing that you have already completed the primary task of the day.

In order to focus, you need to make your work something you do. It's a mind-set, that this is something that you just turn up and do. It's in your schedule, either daily or weekly and you do it. Similar to a day job, a place where you

need to be for a set number of hours that day or risk not having that day job.

Use a schedule and pencil-in the tasks that need to be completed first that make the greatest impact to your current work situation. Give it a set amount of time too, not just a time to start the task, but an estimate of when you are going to finish it too, like with a client project. Your own work needs deadlines too. This creates the constraints and limits procrastination if it's something you need to do and it's the most important thing on the schedule, then you are more compelled to show up and do it, instead of putting it off longer. Limiting yourself creates freedom in your work and promotes productivity and creativity. (Contradiction? Go back to chapter 6.)

Dedicate focussed time to your work, no distractions, turn off notifications, activate airplane mode on your phone, one tab open in Chrome, emails off. Phones are an incredibly easy way to be distracted from our work, we default to checking our phone to keep us busy / filling whatever free time we have when we aren't doing something else.

Just as important as dedicating your focussed time when you're working. **Dedicate time to breaks**, pencil breaks into your schedule and allow yourself the time to be distracted. Check what you need to check online in order to satiate your desire to be distracted, check your notifications, emails, Facebook, news, sports, whatever your thing is.

If not, you will build up a backlog of desire to check the notifications of various emails and phone calls etc. to a point where you binge on it for more time than allocated on your schedule, "just 5 more minutes on Facebook won't do any harm". It acts like a built-up wall of procrastination where you throw out more and more time from your allocated work time and drop it into break time. Allow yourself breaks every now and then, Set a timer, follow it, you will know how much time you need to allocate for yourself, everyone is different.

There are a few points I have found to be useful when creating focussed time for work and limiting distractions;

- **Write down your distractions.** Every time a distracting thought comes into your mind, document it, whatever it was and create a list of things you have to check when it comes to break time. This frees up your mental bandwidth allowing you to think more freely about your work, knowing that you have it written down and can come back to it at any time.
- **Know your time wasters.** This can be anything, people, places, things, tasks, activities. Something that is taking away from the time you should be putting towards your work. Know what you could be doing that is more important than what you are doing now. Ask yourself, **“Is this the most important thing I should be doing now?”**
- **Know your tasks ahead of time.** Plan the night before and let these be the first thing you do when you wake up early. Write down 3 things you want to do that morning and start with the most important. That way when you wake up, you don't get to your workstation and think, “what am I going to do first?” you should already know because you thought of them the night before and now it's just a case of doing them.

It all starts with the self-discipline of getting up early and starting your work then. The results are there to be had. You're more refreshed and invigorated in the morning and that's what makes it easier to get up and start your tasks first thing in the morning. **Your mental capacity is greatest in the morning. Take advantage of it.**

It's a great feeling of accomplishment to know you have completed your most important tasks before the world has even woken. Schedule your time. Document your distractions. Dedicate your time to focus.

32: The 'Free Exposure' Argument

Have you ever been approached by a client and asked to do work for them, work that will take your time, resources and valuable insight to accomplish? Attributes which could be found better invested into another area of your brand or business.

Only to be told, “There is no budget for the design, but it’s a great opportunity”.

It’s not a great opportunity. That person has no idea of your situation, circumstance, or where you are positioned in your career. They can’t tell you what a good opportunity is, only you will know what that is. You know what you want from taking on a project, and you know what direction you want your career to go in from projects. Only you know what you’re doing.

A client can never dictate what a good opportunity is for you.

It’s an arrogant statement for someone to make on your behalf. One that doesn’t respect your time, the value you have to offer and your professionalism.

The client may interchange the word ‘opportunity’ with ‘exposure’. They may say, “It’s great exposure for you”. Is it? What exactly is that exposure, who is going to see your work? Who is the target audience of the proposed work? Is it someone that will query who the designer was behind the work and allow them to follow through to hiring you? If you want to be paid, don’t do work for free. It’s that simple.

Free exposure doesn't pay your bills. And it never will.

If you take on a non-paying client who “doesn't have the budget for you”, you are setting a bad precedent for future clients that come to you from that one client. This is what you accept, if you make an exception for one, you will compromise on another, and another, in a race-to-the-bottom where you don't feel confident enough to ask for the money that your worth from any client.

The client will not value you work at full price if you're working for free or at a discounted price. It devalues your work and devalues your brand perception if you compromise on your price. It shows you're not confident in your capabilities and you will be taken advantage of.

It's not your job to allocate the clients budget, it's their job to fit it around your cost.

If you fill your portfolio or website with certain kinds of clients and projects, that's typically what you're going to attract. Ask yourself, “Is this the kind of client I want to be working with?” Are you practicing selectivity and choosing the best kinds of client to work with and show on your website?

Set your standard high, stick to it, and practice selectivity with the work you say yes to.

When you value your work at full price, it's respected by those who receive it. You do a full price service and this is what you will be known for, not someone who can be taken advantage of because you're in the arts industry and there is no set price like a corporate product such as Apple or Starbucks.

But think of Apple. They aren't known for discounts or giveaways. They are known for offering a full price, premium product that people will buy because

they know that Apple offers a high quality product that has a high value.

To put into perspective. You pay a mechanic and a doctor. You go to them. They aren't cold-calling you. You go to them because you need a product or service from them. Your doctor isn't looking for 'free exposure', they are looking for money in exchange for a quality service. It's the same way it has worked since the turn of the industrial revolution. Likewise with products, you don't walk into Starbucks and barter for your coffee.

This is your livelihood. The same with any other professional in another industry. **You shouldn't cheapen your service because the client couldn't afford you.**

More than likely, if a client is willing to save money in the design aspect, they are trying to skimp in another area too. They are positioning you as a commodity, you are an expense to them. They aren't going to value your services to its full extent. If you aren't offered money by the client then they aren't respecting you as a professional.

This generally isn't someone you want to work with.

There is a time when you can work for free, which I will discuss next. Ask yourself;

- What are my values? Know them so that you won't devalue them.
- What are my rates? (Chapter 7)
- Am I trying to grow my brand/service.

The clients you say yes to are a true reflection of how you view your brand or business. You attract what you broadcast. **Raise the bar, keep it high, stick to your values, respect yourself and you will be respected.**

33: When Should You Work For Free

There are only 2 times when you should work for free. Self-initiated work, and when you offer to work for free.

Like I mentioned before, you will know what you want from a project. Be it the portfolio building, the experience of bringing someone through your professional process etc. Only you can dictate that to a client, they can never tell you what you want, be it 'free exposure' or otherwise.

Self-initiated projects allow you to build your portfolio in a meaningful way that you can tailor to suit what you wish to broadcast to potential clients, and what kind of audience you wish to attract and build.

This is where you practice your work, your technical skill and ability to produce work. You put into play the productivity techniques from waking early, planning the night before, focussing and taking breaks, your creative process etc.

But even more beneficial to working on self-initiated work, is offering it for free.

Non profit organisations are a great example of when you can offer your services for free. They bolster your portfolio by allowing you to practice taking a client through your professional process from; The initial conversation, pitching the problem you have identified and are going to solve for them (remember, you are going to them, not the other way around), taking them through your process, setting deadlines and expectations, and the deliverables.

But be weary of this approach to getting clients, with asking for payment. **Cold calling a client is almost like begging for the work.** It's never really a good strategy and can appear desperate on behalf of your brand, as in "I'm not getting any work, please work with me".

A client approached in this manner also won't be invested in the project, why would they, this isn't a problem that they think they have, or have yet to identify it. You have approached them about it, and not the other way around. This may make it hard to get the necessary resources and may affect channels of communication down the line, as they see you as just someone who is doing a bit of work for free for them. Initially, they were never seeking this work, so it won't be a priority for them.

But this is a great opportunity for you to present yourself as a problem solver. Someone who can see the potential to make a part of their brand better. **It's important for you to establish yourself as someone who offers a great deal of value in whatever you do.** Direct them to another problem you solved, if you have a similar one, the better. Show your case studies and your process in your work, how you approached it, and why this is the best solution for that particular case.

Establish your knowledge and demonstrate your professionalism through your case studies.

This may lead to overcrowding your portfolio with a certain kind of work that will attract this kind of client, so again, practice selectivity to filter out the best clients to approach, vice versa.

The key to offering your work for free is to build your portfolio, but even more important, is to create case studies from the work you do for these clients. **You will need to display your professionalism and decision making process for future clients to see how you solve problems and what value**

you can offer them.

There are many different problems to be solved in the world around you. Another approach to cold calling a potential client and offering your services for free. You identify the problem, and you solve it anyway, and present a finished body of work equal to the value of a full paying job, before even talking to them.

This shows them that you are focussed on solving problems and providing value, and demonstrates your professionalism and ability to identify problems. This can potentially lead to paying work from word of mouth passed on by that client.

Most importantly, you must treat each unpaying client as if they were paying you and offer them a piece of work equal to the value of a full paying project. That is the only way it will be valuable to them, and the only way you will get experience from deal with professional clients.

Even if they say no and politely decline the work you have done, you have still set a good precedent with them, and they may pass on future work to you, having already demonstrated these skills to them. You also have a full case study you can use for you portfolio to display to future clients.

Use free work as a tool to build and demonstrate your professionalism and portfolio. **This will establish you credibility and problem solving ability for future paying clients to hire you.**

34: How To Get The Best Clients

Are you just starting off in the freelance business, or do you have a drought of clients approaching you for work? Even if you aren't struggling or in a bad spell and you're looking to grow a healthy client base. There are a few areas that you should review and question within your process, your pricing, professionalism, selectivity, portfolio items and so on.

You can get clients any way you wish, anywhere you wish. But you will only find the best clients by practicing selectivity.

“So how do I know who are the best clients? How do I select them?” you say. Well, firstly, you need to be good. Your work needs to be so good that clients want to hire you to solve their problems. You do this by displaying your best work, and describing your process for that work. Be conscious of what a client wants to see in your work, what problems you're solving, how you're solving them, why you choose one thing over another. You need to display your decision-making ability for potential clients to see.

Ask yourself, “Would you hire you?”

Practice. It's the only way to get better. Take classes, do online courses, read books and broaden your knowledge of your subject field. There are a multitude of different ways to improve. But you're only going to get better by taking action. You don't become good at something overnight. At some point you're going to have to put in a lot of hard work.

When a client approaches you about hiring you to do work for them. **Position yourself as an investment.** Don't start the conversation off around money.

This is a sure-fire way for the client to see you as an expense, not someone who is going to provide a wealth of value to their brand and business in the long-term. Establish the relationship as professional and as someone who is going to be of value and provide solutions to the client. Ask questions about the reasoning behind why they are hiring you and what they wish to achieve through hiring you. Consult with them. Ask about the perceived value of the project to them and what kind of impact revenue or profit-wise this will have on their business.

Asking the right kind of questions and how you ask them is key to bolstering the relationship and closing the deal.

Construct a questionnaire to send to clients when they are looking to work with you. But you need to ask the right type of questions at the beginning in order to filter the right type of client. “But what is the right type of client?” you ask.

The right type of client is one that understands your process and is onboard with your values. They see you as a professional in every sense of the matter and can identify the value that you have to offer them.

It’s your responsibility to ask the correct questions and screen your clients so you may select the best ones for you. Use the questionnaire to practice selectivity. The questions you ask should be able to pick out clients who are really onboard with your value and ones who are just bad clients, who won’t respect our time, see you as an expense, try to undercut your rates. The list is endless. But one thing is for sure;

Never bring your price down arbitrarily if a client can’t afford you.

After having the initial email conversation with the client, having sent them your questionnaire and identifying that they are onboard with you and un-

derstand your process. You have found the right type of client for you. You need to set the expectations of the project. What is going to be delivered by you, when is it going to be delivered, what is your goal, what is the clients goal with the project, why are they hiring you, The assets that are going to be sent to you, how much your pricing the project? etc.

You're the professional, it's your responsibility to ask the right questions.

Don't be afraid to ask them questions either. Find out why they want your services, what are the profits going towards, what is the products target audience, what's their long-term and short-term goal with your work.

This can be overwhelming for someone new to client work. How to have the initial email conversations and ask the correct questions is vital to the project going ahead at all, and can take practice before getting it right.

To sum up some of these steps;

- **You need to be good.** Practice your skill, make sacrifices, become a recluse and deliberately aim to get better at your work.
- **Discover your personal values.** Identify what you stand for, your virtues about your work, your views as to what the best client for you would be like. Know who you are and what you are about, and what kind of person you would like to work with.
- **Craft your questionnaire around these values.** By asking the right questions, you filter out people you don't wish to work with. It will only lead to heartache and a waste of your time and resources down the line.
- **Know your value.** Know what you're worth, how to price your products or services, what your time means to you, what else you could be doing. More than likely, you're not charging enough.
- **Set expectations.** When the project is due, what deliverables are due, the

licensing rights, what the project is being used for, what is your goal etc.

- **Position yourself as an investment.** Don't open the conversation with a money figure, ask the client their purpose for hiring you, what do they wish to achieve by coming to you. What problems can you solve for them. They know you can solve problems because they seen it from case studies you displayed in your portfolio.
- **Establish yourself as a professional.** Be confident in your ability and how you handle yourself. There is a reason why the client came to you in the first place. You're good at what you do.

35: Working Remotely Vs. In Office

Normally, when you work for someone else, they require you to work on site with them. Whereas if you're an independent/freelance artist, you have a lot more freedom to choose where you wish to work and gives you the ability to move around more freely. Whether you like working from home or in an office comes from your personality type. Introverted or extroverted, mixing with people and being in a noisy/busy environment. Or working from home, in an isolated environment and solitude. Away from crowded offices and noise (generally).

The age-old stigma for young designers, photographers, creative graduates etc. would be to move to large cities. Where the work is bountiful and there is endless opportunities for work and chance meetings with other creatives and people in your line of work, directors, agency owners, startups, and people looking to hire you in general. A chance for new work, closer proximity to resources.

Communication was harder for people outside of a city, for the most part due to the absence of the internet.

This is not the case now, as most artists I talk to now say that there is more opportunity for them online more so than in their locality. The abundance of social media, blogging, portfolio, image sharing and e-commerce platforms allows you to create your own work and products to showcase and sell online at your own ease, in your very own home.

The internet gives us more of an opportunity than ever to create and showcase your work, regardless of geographical location.

Western society is trending more in the direction of working remotely, yet there are still some negative connotations associated with people who work from home. That they don't wish to leave the house, they may be lazy. Which may be true, depending on how disciplined you are when working at home. If you find yourself easily distracted by social media or other activities while trying to do your work, you may fall into the trap of thinking that you will get a lot done by working at home. **You must have a solid work plan in place and dedicate specific time for your distractions.**

The night before, make a list of 3 things you need to do the next morning and start with the most difficult.

The best clients hire the best people, regardless of geographical location. There are great opportunities from working in an office too, from communication, learning and generating ideas, discovering new insights, collaborating with different minds, and that feeling of comfort you get just being in the company of others (see; hermit mentality).

As an extrovert, I enjoy working in an office space, but if your job is predominantly digital, don't be fooled into thinking that it's the only option available for you. Be open with your client/employer, discuss the possibility of working remotely a few days out of the month to start then gradually work from there, even if they insist on you being present in location. **On average, the daily commuter spends about 2 hours a day commuting to their workplace.**

Think of the side projects you can work on or even start, the family time you can have, or an activity you could take up in those 2 hours.

The practice you could have on your secondary passion (or even primary). Let that be the motivation you need to bring it up with your next client who

wishes for you to work on location. There are benefits to working in both environments, both depending on which personality type you are.

Ask yourself;

- Are you able to work effectively from home, being disciplined, without being easily distracted?
- Or do you need to be in the hustle and bustle of a busy office or shared workspace environment to motivate you to work?
- Can you really be productive at home? Is it just something people say that they can work at home, to give off the impression that they have more freedom in their work?

Can you really be disciplined at home without distraction? Yes. But ultimately, it comes down to how passionate you are about your work.

36: Should You Go To College?

My brother was telling me about the trials and tribulations of his college course and it had me thinking back to a time when I didn't know what I wanted to do when I finished school. College seemed to be the default thing, and many young adults went straight into college, regardless if they knew what profession they wanted to follow.

In general, there is a big emphasis on going to college after school, and luckily I live in a country (Ireland) that offers affordable college fees, whereby, if you end up disliking your course or discover that it's not the direction you wish to pursue, then dropping out is no big financial lose.

But what if you had something else? What if you had a passion that you wished to pursue but wasn't a college course? Something creative, something you could make a living from while pursuing your passion.

What if you were so good at it that instead of going to college, you could invest that time into growing it into a business?

The key to going down this road at the very beginning is to get your family involved. Your family need to support your decision. Your family is going to be looking out for your best interests, but sometimes this will mean taking the safe route, going down the beaten path, following the traditional proven method. **Sometimes your families best interest is not your best interest.**

Your family is there to support you, to keep you safe. Thus by you taking a risk is not their best interest, even if it means you doing something you love and making a living with your passion.

Example; say you're a guitarist. You have played for years, you're good at it, and you enjoy the act of playing the guitar. If you decide to pursue this as a viable means of living and you're passionate about it, then you need a plan. **A long-term plan is what's going to allow your passion to flourish.**

If you focus on money at the beginning, that is a sure-fire way to kill off any passion that you started with, as it then becomes a job. You position the passion as a job, as a facade, it's only a mask to what the reason behind you pursuing it is because of money. **You will never grow your passion as it will become something you need to do, instead of something you want to.** You may realise that you don't enjoy guitar or have the drive to pursue it in the long-term, risking not having a formal education or something you can build upon and monetize in the future.

Start with something you love. It will motivate and drive you. Set a goal. It will keep you focussed.

All this isn't to say that education is unimportant, it's the opposite. **I highly encourage people to be constantly learning.** A skill, a language, a piece of software. The internet has allowed us access to learn almost anything you wish, and for the most part, totally free. You can learn the vast majority of a subject matter online for free, maybe not all in the same place, but if you're dedicated enough, you will find it.

If you decide to pursue a passion instead of going to college at the time of finishing school, it's going to be much harder work for you. You're not going to get the same support from a college and the degree that comes with it. Nor are you benefiting from the years of curation and quality that have gone into crafting the curriculum on that course. The over reliance in society for young people to have a degree as a means of entry isn't going to work in your favour either.

You are going to have to invest 4 years, like a college course, into your passion, showing up daily and deliberately practicing, and getting better. Imagine it as a 4 year college course.

To complete a college course shows something about that person. The time they invested, the tenacity and drive to complete something you have dedicate 3/4/5 years of their life to.

There is a bad cultural idealism related to the time spent in college to how fit you are for a job. **There are no guarantees that you will 'fall' into a job as soon as you have a degree.** I don't believe the system (especially in the current economic state) is set up for that. You're not automatically set up for life on the back of a degree.

You have to constantly put in effort in your life, you need to learn new skills and build your knowledge. Companies grow, software changes, skills evolve. You need to learn how to learn, and how to adapt to changes in your professional field. Your skills will stagnate if you don't actively focus on learning and evolving your skills and knowledge.

Another example: a couple of 22 year olds apply for the same job. One has just graduated from college, having studied a course directly related to the industry, and the other has been freelancing for the past 4 years in the same industry. Unfortunately, for both young candidates, it's regarded that the college graduate will more fit for the role, having dedicated 4 years to learning in a formal institute and having just learned the latest software, techniques and practices in that field. Which stands to benefit those in the company in which they may be hired, as others there will learn from them. Which is economically efficient for a business, as they don't have to spend money to train their employees externally.

Even though the freelancer has demonstrating a level of intelligence and direct experience required for the job, the amount of importance that is put on possessing a college degree is unfortunate for younger freelancers. See; Chapter 22.

This isn't to say that one is more fit for the job than the other. It comes down to the role they are applying for. The freelancer, having 4 years direct experience in the same field, working with and dealing with client, self promoting, curating their work, developing a website, dealing with money and getting paid, deliberately practicing their skill, have a burning passion in the field which has been demonstrated, so much so that they risked not conforming to what they 'should' have done by going to college, instead blazed their own trail and took the risk to pursue what they love to do. **This has a lot to say about that character, more so than any degree can.**

There is no right or wrong answer to the college question. **Just because you're not in college doesn't mean you're not learning, likewise, just because in college doesn't mean your learning.**

Be passionate about something, find something you love and pursue it, even that you want to make a living out of it. Have a plan, develop a long-term mindset around your passion, curate your work, grow an audience, deliberately practice and learn new skills. Set goals, it will keep you focussed and motivated to achieve.

Define success and what it means to you. It's a subjective term so make sure you define it for yourself, and not let someone else define it for you.

If you knew what you know now, would you have gone to college? You'll only get better by doing and there is no better 'doing' than with real world experience.

37: How To Set Long-Term Goals

You want to set a big goal. You want to leave a legacy and fulfil a dream. You're inspired to pursue this thing so much. You believe you can achieve it. Be it that you want to own a business, start a photography studio, develop a ground-breaking app, release an album or publish a best-selling book.

There's a well known concept in entrepreneurship which involves long-term goals, called a 5 year plan. Which is, dedicating 5 years of your life to focus specifically on this 1 goal you have that you want to achieve.

5 years gives you good time to learn and master a skill, to become a professional in that field, develop connections and build an audience, if you were to start from day 1 and show up every single day.

If you set your goals too small, you will never achieve larger goals. A big goal is a mindset. But if you set your goals too big and don't achieve them, the results can be paralysing and you may not wish to keep pursuing them.

You need to set sub goals within your bigger goal and celebrate them when they are achieved.

The key to achieving your goal is having a solid plan. The clearer your goal is, the clearer the plan to get there will be. Making it easier to take action on the steps necessary to get there. If the plan is too vague, this makes it harder to take action on the steps needed to get there. **The first steps are the easiest ones, the hardest part is being consistent.**

Having harder actionable steps can lead to burnout and completely

dropping the goal altogether. Which may see your earlier efforts at starting the goal a waste of time. This is why you see so many blogs with only 1 or 2 posts, or even posting sporadically every few months about various non-related topics. There is no plan. There is no consistency. We've all seen them.

You can't wait for inspiration to strike, you need to take action, you need to show up.

To make it easier for yourself, you will need to disassociate the goal you wish to achieve to the money you make. So there is no pressure to make money from the goal while you are trying to achieve it. This will lead to scarcity and cutting corners, thus devaluing the goal and its results. It will become a chore and you won't be driven to pursue it anymore.

Don't rely on money to achieve the goal.

Just because you have a 5 year plan, doesn't mean you are limited to this one thing for the next 5 years, which can be daunting in thought. In your plan, assign time for a secondary passion, or even a tertiary passion that you have. Make it clear in your mind which one has priority and what it is that needs to be done that best affects the primary passion and goal.

Your only fooling yourself if you're allowing the other passions to distract you from the main goal.

Even if one passion doesn't work out, you can then always pivot to another. One thing leads to the next. You're not limited to one thing to the rest of your life. You may discover that you enjoy something else even more halfway through this goal, but you would never have found out if you hadn't pursued this long-term goal in the first place.

Quick-step guide to achieving your goal;

- **Find your passion** – What do you love to do? Do you love it enough to do it everyday for 5 years? Are you willing to have your name associated with this profession / skill?
- **Set your goal** – What do you want to do? What do you want to be known for? What do you hope to achieve in the next 5 years? What are you willing to sacrifice in order to pursue this long-term goal?
- **Plan** – Brainstorm your goal and write down the potential pitfalls and barriers to overcome to get there. What tasks / steps can you do right now to be one step closer? Do you need to learn something new to achieve this goal? There will always be barriers that you cannot account for on when making the initial plan, so write down the actionable steps you can do right now in order to be one step closer to the goal.
- **Selectively share** – Share your goal with a small amount of very supportive people, you want to surround yourself with the right kinds of people. The wrong people will shoot you down.
- **Work hard** – You have the goal in mind, you know what you want to do and what needs to be done because you have the plan. Now you just need to do it. Ideas are worthless and talk is cheap.

Prioritize what you can do next. That next step that will take you closer. **Ultimately, it comes down to putting in the hard work and showing up everyday.**

38: Creative Block & How To Overcome It

Whether you're just starting your passion or you're 10 years into it, it's inevitable that you're going to be struck by creative block. If you have never experienced it before (or yet), **it's a feeling of being completely powerless towards your work.** A feeling of wanting to express your work but not being able to. It renders your creativity completely paralysed and left in the dark about knowing what direction to go in.

It's like having all these ideas and thoughts in your head but not knowing which one is the right solution for the problem.

It means you're in a rut. You're stuck. But this can be a good thing. It provides you with validity. **Having creative block validates that you have a passion for the thing you're doing.**

If you don't get creative block with the work you do, it means you're not passionate enough about what you do, or you're not pushing yourself hard enough.

After reading that, If you thought to yourself, "but I work plenty hard at my passion and I love what I do, and I've never gotten creative block in the 15 years I've been in my industry". This means you have an extremely good balance between the topics I will describe later and in your creative process. If you're truly working in a creative field for 15 years and have never experienced a creative block, it means you're not original, you're not pushing the boundaries of your ability to do your work and be innovative with your skills.

Creative block occurs when your creative energy is burned out.

Ideas and execution are your two sources that tap into your creative energy. Generating ideas is a hard process, unless your copying them. But combining ideas from your sources of inspiration into new and original pieces of work that encompass your style is what drains your creative energy. The same as executing on these ideas into something new and unique to your style of work also drains from your well of creative energy.

If you're not struggling to come up with ideas or execute the idea, it means you're not working hard enough at either level.

A creative block isn't a sudden occurrence that crashes on you, changing your views, questioning your motive and choices, and is not some sort of mid-life crisis. It's a gradual realisation during a project that you don't know how to progress, where you feel like you have exhausted all possible options without solving the problem.

Here are some of the best and most practical ways of overcoming creative block;

- **Learn something new** – A new piece of software, a language, a skill. You will always benefit through learning. Learning a new set of skills for a profession or practice allows you to present those new skills, transfer and extrapolate their problem solving assets back into the first passion in which you are stuck on and can rekindle the fire for it. With a new skill comes a new set of challenges and problems to solve. Overcoming these can provide the clarity to overcome the problems you were trying to solve in the first place. Always strive to learn.
- **Take a break** – Getting away from your workspace can allow you time to clear your thoughts. Get outside, go for a walk, take the afternoon off to go hiking. Getting away from the problem can give you a better view of it. A

breath of fresh air can provide a new perspective and offer the clarity you need to kickstart your creativity again.

- **Pursue a secondary passion** – We all have multiple outlets and things that we are good at, take a break from your main pursuit, even for just a week every couple of months to spend on your secondary passion. Be it music, photography, painting, having a secondary passion opens the gates to a new skill that presents its own problems to solve. Solving these problems may just be the kickstart you need to get your mind going, which then lends itself to the first. A problem you solved from the secondary passion will present itself as the answer to the problem you were trying to get away from in the first. But when your stuck on the first, the second passion will appear more attractive as there is an open gate to through where you are freely able to do work and progress. So be weary not to ignore the problem of the first passion.
- **Try something new** – Embrace a new culture, try a new activity, move your workspace, travel abroad, explore a city. You may just be stuck in the mundane, this happens when you're too familiar with your routine, you crave something new. Allow yourself to indulge in that new thing. Sometimes all you need is a new perspective from trying something you have never done before. It broadens your mind. Take a road trip, do something spontaneous, buy something for yourself that you normally wouldn't, read a magazine that you would normally never read, travel a different route to your workplace, meet new people, be inspired. Don't do anything stupid.
- **Early sleep, early wake** – The satisfaction, mentally and physically, when you go to bed early and wake early is incomparable, this is my favourite way of overcoming creative block, which also happens to be the most inexpensive way. It's surefire, every time. Going to bed early and doing your work early before your brain has been processing the information of the day. Your mind is clear and you have not consumed any information from the outside world. It's a great feeling knowing that you have accomplished a body of work before the world has even woken.

Try looking for inspiration from the sources you enjoy, but try too hard and you may become oversaturated by them. Sometimes your worst ideas appear to be the best, just so you can overcome the problem. Embrace creative block, ride it out, you will learn something new from it. Recognise that you're experiencing it and consider it a growth process to your work.

You wouldn't be stuck if it wasn't important to you. Remember, it's not creative block if you don't care.

39: Ideas Are Worthless

So you have an idea. Something that doesn't exist and you believe there is a demand for it and you can see a place for it in the world. You envision the final product in your head, what it will look like, what purpose it will serve and who will use it. You even get some positive feedback from friends about the idea. This could be the next Facebook, you think.

No. It's completely worthless. It's just a brainwave, we all have brainwaves. Ideas are easy to come up with, anyone can generate an idea. There is no assertion of energy or planning in an idea. **The hard part is executing the idea.** This is where the majority of ideas fail, because they are never acted on. They have never started.

What worth can you give to something that doesn't exist?

Ideas are held in your mind in their absolute perfect state. It hasn't been acted on, therefore it can't fail, and since people see it in it's perfect state, they rarely act on it out of fear of failing in the attempt of pursuing the idea.

There is nothing new under the sun. Your idea has already been thought of countless times before and more than likely someone followed through and acted on the idea. They acted because they wanted to see the idea flourish, they were willing to sacrifice, devoted time and learned a skill in order to see it through.

If you see yourself as just an ideas person and don't possess the skills necessary to pursue and execute the idea, then you're the problem. You need to learn. You need to be willing to learn, at the very least, the skills necessary to

build a basic foundation of your idea. From which, you can judge the difficulties, challenges and problems that the idea may run into down the line if you continue pursuing it.

Your idea has already been acted on before, and held in the same ideal state as you have envisioned. That person ran into problems that forced them to bring it in another direction than what they held in their mind. Which is why you believe it to not exist. But someone has already attempted the idea.

This is where the fear of failing comes from. It's a scary theme, especially when you are personally and financially invested in executing the idea. When you share your ideas with your close friends and family, given the feedback, you can fall into a false sense of accomplishment from thinking you have thought of an idea that doesn't exist yet, when in fact, you haven't done anything, nor acted on the idea.

You're wasting your time latching onto an idea that you're never going to act on.

Document the idea and move on. You may return to it in another season when you have the time and are willing to sacrifice for it. Your struggle isn't with trying to contain and keep your ideas under wraps, because to you, it's seen in its fullest value, you hold it in the greatest light. It's yours and you thought of it. But others won't hold it to the same light as you. It's not as valuable to them. Others have their own thoughts and ideas that are important to them.

Your struggle is with yourself and actually starting an idea. Dedicating time and learning a new skill that forms the basis of your idea. You'll come across problems and more than likely it will not appear in the same ideal view that you have in your mind, because people are bad estimators. Things don't always appear as they seem. But don't let that turn you off pursuing the idea and ex-

ecuting on it. **You will only know by doing.** You will always learn something new and be better from the experience.

It's not about your idea, it's about your execution. Put in the hard work at the start. Achievers are the ones who acted.

Think about our current times with cool, tech startups being the 'in-thing'. Their ideas were not original, nor were they the first to start. They were just the ones who executed well and continue to execute well.

If you're in doubt about starting, just remember, Instagram was built in 8 weeks.

40: Taking Action On Your Ideas

In a follow-up to chapter 39 about ideas being worthless. I wanted to talk about why you need to take action on your ideas and why it's so important. If you don't take action on an idea you may be squandering an opportunity. The idea will always move you forward from your current situation. No matter if you fail or not. You will learn something from your experience that you didn't know before you started.

If you find yourself generating new ideas everyday. Ideas you believe could be great. Something that hasn't been done before. Something that has a place in the world and solves people's problems. Of course you do, everyone has ideas. Ideas are worthless, you need to take action. **Action breeds success.**

There are people who have ideas but don't have the capacity to execute on them straight away and there are people who have ideas and the capacity to execute on them as soon as they generate the idea. But no matter how skilled you are in being able to execute, you can always take the first steps to get you closer to the end goal. **You don't have to be skilled to start.**

Take the first step, start something today. Make your idea into actionable steps, something that you can work towards in the long-term.

It's easy to say 'start, take action and do the work'. But there are deep-rooted reasons as to why we don't drop everything and takes action on ideas we just generate every few hours. The idea needs to be feasible, you need to calculate the risks involved and plan the steps you need to take to reach the goal of having your idea brought to fruition. You need to set goals, you need to plan, you need to know if you like doing this thing so you can dedicate your time to

it everyday for the next couple of years.

Are you passionate enough to pursue it everyday for the next 2 years?

In order to take action on the idea, you need the capacity, in order to get the capacity, you need to prioritize. To prioritize, you need to say no to other things in your life to create the space you need for your idea. If your going to pursue the idea and dedicate yourself to it, your idea deserves space and time.

You may be thinking that you may not have the time to stat the idea, or you may not have the money you need to start. Make time. We make time for the things that are important to us. If you don't feel like you want to make time for it, then you're not passionate enough about it. Make time for it, say no to client work, more importantly, say no to the 'wrong' clients. Sacrifice temptations, or hobbies (for the time being). **Is there something you're not doing now that would be a better use of your time?**

It's going to be hard, success is never easy, it will take a lot of hard work, sacrifice and failure in order to success. You need to focus your time to achieve your goals.

If you have the time, but don't have the money. Start. It doesn't matter what tools you have or what course you need to invest in or assets you need to buy. These things come by saving up and prioritising which one you need to invest in so you can take the next step. **You can always take the first step towards your goal completely free.**

You have a €200 camera, but you wish to invest in a €2,000 camera before you start. As you believe this is what your idea will need so it will be successful. You can never be sure if an idea will work out. What if you aren't sure if your passionate enough about the idea and it may fizzle out or the passion dissipates when you realise you don't like the action of doing the idea, it was

just the final, romanticized result of the idea that you liked? Then you are out of a lot of money.

Make it a gradual process. The tools you start with don't matter. Evolve into the better equipment. As your passion and your idea grows you can then invest and increase the quality of the output. **Start with providing the value.**

The fact that you are taking action on your idea sets you apart from the majority of people who aren't. As long as you are thinking about what problems you can solve and how you can help people, be it entertainment or educational. **This sets you apart from the people who are only consuming this type of content.** Your work is valuable. Your actions are valuable. Your time is valuable.

Your ideas are in your mind. No one can read your mind. What worth can you give to something that doesn't exist. **Stop over-thinking. Make a choice to do something. Take the first step. Stick with it. Start producing.**

Think about how much content you consume. The world needs more creators.

If you're not going to take the first step today, then when will you?

41: Experiences Vs. Things

How do you buy happiness? In order to be happy, you need to spend your money on experiences, not things. Spend your money on gathering stories, memories and living in anticipation.

Buy experiences, not things. It's true that you don't remember owning material goods as quick as you can evoke a fond memory or story you had about a particular place, or moment in time that stood out for you. This is why people go travelling, to broaden the mind, experience new places and gather memories. After you buy material goods, we always take it for granted when we own it. It was the anticipation of owning it and the happiness that it was going to bring you from owning it is what you were experiencing.

But what if you have an entrepreneurial personality? Someone who likes to start projects, ventures, businesses. How can you do the hard work required when your time is spent travelling and buying experiences?

Time is a finite (yet abstract) resource, something we all know too well. If your goal is to build something, you will need to invest in the two most finite resources humanity attains, time and money.

There is a lot of social pressure on young people to travel, live their lives when they finish college. Thinking about it made me question my motives and why I wasn't spending my time and money investing in my own experiences.

While in fact I do spend money on good experiences, just not my own.

From an entrepreneurial and creative standpoint. How is anything meant to be created, improve upon and built if you are only spending money on your

own experiences? I mentioned producers vs. consumers before. It comes back to this premise. Consumers are selfish and take. Producers are selfless and give. As an individual working towards a goal, you have to sacrifice your own time and invest your own money into what you want to create.

As a sole trader, solopreneur, individual artist or creator, you can't be selfish. We are the people taking a risk, sacrificing our time and money to build something, an app, a website, a service. Something that solves problems for people, something consumable. **We are the ones creating experiences. It's our livelihood. It's what we love to do.**

Experiences are personal, they are important for your brand. Spend money on other people's experiences of you. People remember the experience they had with you and this will inform their decision to return to you as a customer. Save money, invest in quality products and services. Business cards, your website, apparel, your deliver method. People recognise good quality products and services. Giving your customers good quality products promotes a positive experience with your brand and attributes loyalty to you. A negative or neutral experience results in a loss.

When it comes to brand recognition, you have to go above and beyond. **What are you doing differently that sets you apart from the competition?**

By definition, a Macbook is a thing. But used in the correct way can create an experience. It's a tool that can be used to build. **Spend money on things that create experiences.**

Spend your money on business cards. A business card is a thing, but it's a thing that creates experiences for other people, that experience is of you. Your business card, like your products and website, is a reflection of you. Anything that represents your brand or business affects your brand perception and whether someone will remember you or not. Having no business

card is better than having a bad business card. **The things you use to create an experience of your brand or business speaks volumes about your values and what you stand for.**

Do you want to hand a prospective client a flimsy, €20, batch processed card? Or would you rather hand them a custom-made, letterpress business card printed on 500gsm pearl-white paper? Which do you think will leave the greatest impression on your brand?

To the person of whom you just handed your card to, subconsciously to them, it says something about your ability, your confidence, and your professionalism. **It's a statement that you care about the quality you offer.** Never cheap-out, invest in your brand. Invest in yourself.

How people experience your brand isn't out of your control. It's entirely up to you. Invest in things you can use to create a positive experience someone has with your brand.

42: The Importance Of Case Studies

You have been creating designs for years. It's an important hobby of yours, something that has grown slowly over time. You have a passion and a drive for it. Now you want to take it to the next level. You may have been making a small sum of money off of it in the past from friends and acquaintances looking for your services. But now you want to get serious. You want to become a professional.

You want to turn it into a business, something you can work full-time at and make a living from your passion. It's something you have grown personally. You have plans for it to grow even further and have envisioned an end goal as to what you want the business to be. You know its something you love, you've let the passion flourish naturally. **You love the act of doing the work. Now you can start to monetize your services professionally.**

But now you have exhausted the work from most of your friends and acquaintances and the jobs are coming in slowly, if any at all. You want to branch out, make new clients and have them approaching you. How do you grow your client list organically without you approaching potential clients and asking them to do the favour of working for them? Because that's what you are doing when you approach a client for work. **You're asking them for a favour.**

So how do you get approached by clients? First, you need to be good at what you do. Then when you're good. **You need to display case studies.**

Case studies allow you to go into greater depth about the work that you do. It's a behind the scenes look at how you work, how you solve problems, and provide solutions. It provides the reader/viewer a transparent look at the way

you work, and instills trust and confidence that you have the ability to do the work. It's a form of proof of your competency and professionalism.

Case studies are the difference between you getting hired or not.

That's the power of case studies. It provides the potential client a look at your professional process, how you approach the work, and all the challenges and problems that are considered. This shows them that you're not designing and creating work at your own whim, only making artwork and designs for yourself and not providing a valuable solution for the client you worked with.

Case studies demonstrate your professionalism, process, and knowledge of your skill.

In your case studies, which should be displayed on your website, you need to show the start to finish process and break-down the step by step as to how you approached and executed the piece of work for the client. You're showing them how you work in different scenarios, under different sets of challenges. **Case studies, because of their transparency, establish a trust in potential clients.**

Now that the importance of case studies has been identified. What do you include in your case studies? Depending on your work and industry, these may vary, but in a general creation process, you should document;

- **Introduction** – When the client came to you, what situation they were in, who the client is and what they do. An overview of the beginning of the client conversation and planning stage.
- **Goal & Brief** – What the client wants as an end goal, what services they want from you and what problem they wanted solved by doing so, what outcome they wished to see from this solution, who the target audience is and what they are trying to convey with this piece, Why they wanted

you to solve this problem, what you wish to do with the problem, initial thoughts and the direction you will take the project.

- **Sketches** – Show the start of your work through sketches, this is where the physical work should begin with any project. What direction you brought it in and the considerations for the project. Show the sketches of various styles you could have went in, and explain why you didn't. The final sketches of the style you went with.
- **Execution** – The how, what, and why of what you did. Every decision you made during the process and why you made the decisions. The colour, the font, the style, your artistic flair. Any problems or challenges you faced and revisions that were made because of these problems. How you overcame them to get to the place you are at by the end of the piece.
- **Vectors** – Show the final piece of your artwork. The styles, alternative colours, sizing and scaling for different mediums (mobile, desktop etc.). Mockups in difference project specific scenarios. Meaning, don't provide a logo mockup on a shop window, if it's only intended to be placed in a digital space.
- **Summery** – How the project went, the problems you solved for the client, the challenges you overcame, why you choose to go in a certain direction. Any final thoughts on the project.

Providing case studies on your portfolio is a window for potential clients to look through at your process. It's their very own space to see your work as in-depth and transparent as possible. It shows your competency and knowledge in your industry.

This is your best chance to demonstrate your professionalism. This is how you take the next step to becoming a professional freelance business with new clients who approach you, not the other way around.

Case studies transform your portfolio into a destination site.

43: How To Be A Better Writer

It all starts with writing. I have written about the topic of writing and its importance to your brand and professionalism in the past and I'm hoping I have convinced you to start writing. With this post, I want to provide a clearer, more informative guide as to how to improve your writing.

So why should you write? People write because they have a message. "But what if the message I have to say has already been said thousands of times before me, so why should I even start?", I hear you say. There are a myriad of reasons why you should start, and a many more why you shouldn't, but these are all excuses.

To narrow it down to a creatives' standpoint. You have value in being you, you have a unique voice and your own experiences and stories to tell, regardless if it has been told by someone else before you. If it has been said before, you have your own style and voice in which you say it, which adds uniqueness to the message.

Psychologically, it takes the brain 7 times of hearing the same piece of information for you to retain it. If somebody comes across a piece you have written and that particular time is the only time it resonated, even though they have heard it multiple times before. **That person will attribute the full value of that information directly to you, regardless of the people from whom they have heard it before.**

You never know who is primed to value your writing every time you write something. **But, if you don't write anything, you will never know.** Writing establishes you as an expert in your field, as people can read your insights

and thoughts on topics that relate to that industry.

As a designer, think of the content as an iceberg. The smaller part above the surface is viewable to all and easily recognizable, but the bulk of the content is under the surface.

What if you don't know what to write about? You feel as if you have nothing of value to say. Write anyway. Write about the things you know already, write it passionately. By writing, you discover what you want to say. Think about how you want to communicate that message.

All it takes is a commitment to show up regularly. Make the decision and start now. You can't improve on something that you haven't done before. Clear your mind, write it down. If it's written down, you can come back to it, improve upon it, repurpose its message in a different manner or for a different circumstance. **Don't use your brain as storage.**

Let your audience know that you are knowledgeable about a subject. The more frequently you write, the more you discover what you want to say. It gets easier, you build confidence in your ability because you realise you have a lot to say about the topics you feel passionate about. **Start by writing about the topics you feel most passionately about, show up regularly.**

By writing, you position yourself as an influencer, someone people look to for answers.

So once you have decided that you want to write. How do you start writing? How do you get better?

You don't have to be qualified to write, you don't need an accolade or a course to start writing (of course you can take them, and they are available). Once you are asking yourself these questions and wish to be mindful of the con-

tent in your writing, you're already doing more than most people who aren't aiming to improve, or are even writing in the first place.

The majority of people aren't concerned with the quality of your writing, or your technical skill, they are concerned with the message and how clearly you express it. **There is merit in good writing, but this will come over time and with deliberate practice, a commitment to show up.**

How do you get better at writing? A brief introductory guide to begin writing;

- **Write pen to paper** – not fingers to keyboard. It's more organic and is good practice as it's something you can reference, it won't accidentally get deleted. Use a notebook or scrap paper. It's a blueprint to your writing. This is where you build, then transcribe to digital. if you go straight to digital, you're more inclined to edit as you go, and ends up taking far longer, which can be a discouraging factor when your first beginning. This resistance will slow you down, hindering your progress and perhaps the message you wish to convey. On paper, you can piece together the part you want to use and the parts you don't, making the process far easier to construct.
- **Find your own voice** – You are a unique individual with different experiences and circumstances to everyone else in the world. Decided if you want to be more formal, conversational or comical in your approach to your message. Remember who your audience is and who your writing is aimed at. Don't copy someone else's style, they are better at being them then you ever will be.
- **Find your audience and write for them** – When you write about a specific topic or subject and curate your writing, regularly and over time, to focus on that area. You will build an audience around that general area. You are what you write. people will put you in a box and associate you with that subject. be aware of this when your writing and even before it. Do you want to be associated with this subject. People will categorise you by the topic you write about. When you have this audience, service their

wants and needs. They are following you for a reason, they like your content and the messages you convey. Keep your content relevant. Discover your niche and write about it consistently.

- **Practice your grammar** – Once you have discovered what you wish to write about, are passionate about it and have accrued a generous following. This is when you can focus on improving the technical element on your writing. No one starts off as a professional. Being aware of the need to learn and improve your skill is taking the next step above casual writing. Make it a routine, something you do weekly, or daily. Write in small, broken up paragraphs. These are more easily digestible to the reader.
- **Provide take-aways and aim to help** – In every post, article, or any piece of writing, provide some form of take-away. Actionable steps in which the reader can apply to their own lives. This is why they come to you, they want answers and insights, tips and tricks. Be mindful of how the reader can use the information personally and how it can better their current situation. Solving people's problems is the quickest way to building an audience that establishes you as a professional in your industry.

Don't worry about getting better straight away. Find what you want to say by writing about what you're most passionate about at this moment in time. When you discover this, write regularly, be consistent in your posting. This will build an audience around that industry/area. Then you can start to look at ways to improve your grammar, your style, vocabulary and the message you wish to convey.

Make the decision to start now.

44: Why You Should Delete Your CV

CV's are a standard form of entry into a business when searching for a new job. It's the first point of contact in which a recruiter will dissect your personality, skills, and your capacity to work, all on a sheet of paper.

CV's are easy. Anyone can draw up a sheet of paper listing their history of workplaces and roles in those organisations. Submitting it virtually from the comfort of their home, miles away from where they will be working this day job, in a hope that they will be given the opportunity to meet in person and interview with the potential employer/recruiter and secure the job. This is common practice for a vast number of industries and candidates. All but one.

The creative industry. Occupations that fall under the umbrella of creativity; photography, painting, filmmaking, web design, audio production and various others. The one common denominator between these pursuits; they are sensory, both visual and auditory. These are qualities and experiences that cannot be captured on paper, out of context and without explanation of its motives and emotions. **This is what makes our industry a special experience, its something the user feels, and not without hard work and long-term goal setting.**

I have never used/needed a CV for any creative day job I have had. **You can't quantify creativity and professionalism. You either are or you are not.**

As a designer, you need your work to be viewed in its home environment, how it was originally intended, and not how others will view it at their convenience on a piece of paper. Your artwork/illustrations/designs work best when they are surrounded by contextual examples of your work and profession. This is

the importance of having a strong virtual presence and making our website your home.

In the creative industry, your website is your CV.

Invest in your website and invest in yourself. Both time and monetary. A good landing page is impressive and visually will instill a good first impression, but what about your track record? How does a recruiter, or even a potential client know that this isn't something you do as a hobby and that you are serious about your freelancing as a business? It's one thing to have and display gorgeous designs and illustrations but it's another to display the insight, problem solving, and the thought process behind your work.

The content that establishes your track record and demonstrates your expertise and professionalism in your work is case studies and writing.

But it needs to be consistent, not at sporadic intervals. You need to consistently write valuable posts and produce new, quality case studies that showcase what you're doing and show why you're doing it. This way, it won't be a grid of images on your website, but an in-depth explanation of the thoughts and decision-making process behind the work and how it came to be in its final form, through the problems you solved.

It demonstrates your ability to work with and manage clients in a professional manner. It's proof that your running your business efficiently. What's more impressive to a potential recruiter;

– A CV with superfluous descriptions, overused buzzwords, and dated workplaces from years passed?

or

– A live website with consistent output demonstrating professionalism with clients, your skills used in real life situations, and an ability to conduct and manage your business in an entrepreneurial manner?

Your showing the recruiter (and potential clients) that you have built and are managing your own business, while you have maintained a day job. Otherwise, all they have to do is go off your word that you have the capability in your current day job. **But this way, you are showing them that you have the capability.**

Buzzwords are ‘fluff’ on a piece of paper that aims to identify you a unique individual, but in fact amalgamate you with the rest of the candidates that the recruiter is viewing, thus producing noise. **Show them what you have built, what you are most proud of. What are you doing to separate yourself from the noise and provide value?**

All a creative needs to initiate the conversation with a new employer is a cover letter. So what should be included in your cover letter? 3 parts;

- The cover letter will explain your current situation, your role and responsibility and the problems you solve at your current day job.
- Who you are, what you’re doing externally with your outside passion and pursuits, what you’re working on, your goals and the position you hope to be in with the help that this day job will offer to furthering your skills, experience and insight.
- Close the letter with a paragraph on yourself. Your values, goals, personality, motivations, what drives you, your inspirations, role models, influencers etc.

The cover letter should be designed to reflect your line of work, and should contain 3 paragraphs with the above 3 points. You are looking for a day job because you want your bills to be paid and to makes ends meet. This is the only way in which you can grow your external freelance business organically, without falling into scarcity. **The new employer will know this, and the right employer with encourage this, and be onboard with your values.**

Treat your recruiter like you treat your clients, establish trust, through your website, and its content. Do this by being consistent. Consistent in producing case studies, writing and with your own visual style. This is how you demonstrate professionalism and establish your expertise in an industry.

It's about presenting your our work in the best possible way to the recruiter, in order to demonstrate that you have the experience, skills and values that they are seeking.

At all times, you need to be good at what you do, provide value and original content. The recruiter doesn't know what you do, how you handle your work, or your capability/skill in your current day job. This is what a reference acts as for previous/current employers, explaining these details, your work ethic, and capacity to complete your roles and responsibility effectively and efficiently. This is what your case studies and writing will act as. They are a proofing system for how you conduct your work professionally and responsibly. **Your website will summarise your background, instilling your track record. While your content will identify your ability and your values to the new employer.**

It's the recruiter's job to make sure they understand you, your skills, and your capacity to complete the tasks in their business in an effective and timely manner. So why not make their job as easy as possible by providing easily digestible information and insight into you and your process? **Like your work with clients; make it as easy as possible for people to get in contact with you, and for them to see your work.**

Would a recruiter hire you based on the content on your site? **Would you hire yourself?**

45: How to Constantly Improve Yourself

Improving yourself, no matter what aspect of your life, is the key to growing and maturing as an individual. No matter what area you aim to improve in your life, be it more time with your family or loved ones, developing new skills and abilities, travelling and seeing new places, meeting new people. These are things that either make you happier, or make you better at something. Both of which are a benefit and have a positive knock-on effect to the other aspects of your life, in turn, motivating and driving your other goals.

When one area of your life is going well, it can passively or actively benefit the other areas.

On the other hand, if you aren't actively improving, or are seeking to improve, your skills can stagnate, causing you to slowdown and forget certain skills that you're not practicing. This stagnation feels like your not going anywhere, that you're stuck in the same place with the same skills, being left behind as the world evolves. Which can cause anxiety and for you to feel down upon yourself for not trying to improve. This can be a motivator in itself, or worse, it can cause you to give up completely.

You slowly begin to lose what you don't practice or maintain.

As creatives, one of our strongest attributes, is our ability to change. There is so much to adopt to now, new mediums, new devices, new software, new hardware and tools. We learn these skills in our spare time, to enable us to grow and remain relevant in our industry. Although, knowing which one will benefit you the most at this very time is also important. **You need to know which skill or piece of software is the most important for you to invest**

your time and money in.

The problem with ‘listicles’ on self-help and improvement is that they state what you should change or improve, but without telling you how, or what way you can begin to change. They don’t tap into why or what drives you to want to change in the first place. The following are ways you can tangibly improve your skills and experiences;

- **Find your role models** – Having people you look up to and emulating their views and values is a great way to improve your life and mindset. You look up to these people for a reason (hopefully the right reasons). Being influenced by people is normally a bad thing, but being influenced by only the right people is a good thing. If you can’t be around the right types of people in real life, then follow them online, reach out to them, ask them questions, tell them your problems. Depending on the person your trying to reach, they may or may not get back to you straight away, be patient, you don’t know their situation, send them positive feedback and tell them what their material and their work means to you and how it affects you. If they are people in real life, then try spend more time with them. They say “never meet your heroes”, that you will be disappointed as they won’t appear as they did when you held them on a pedestal in your predetermined view of them. **But if they are the right type of person, if they are truly a role model, this won’t be true.**
- **Practice secondary passions** – We all have multiple things we are good at. But if you’re curating your primary passion, whatever that may be, practice these skills in your down time when you’re taking a break from your primary passion. Allow yourself the time you need to practice other passions in a healthy way. **This will keep you from becoming burnt-out from your passion and will provide an enjoyable escape from your other passion and pursuits.** This should keep you motivated, as it’s something you enjoy, but also improves a different set of skills. You may

end up finding out that you prefer this passion over your current primary focus. **Remember, you don't have to share everything you do or create with the online world.** As hard as that is now, with tools and apps that make it easier than ever to share your experiences with the world and across multiple platforms at a time. If you're trying to curate your work to show just one of your skills (your primary skill and passion) to grow an audience of your own, people are going to put you in a box. You need to actively shape the box people put you in.

- **Be around the right people** – Similar to finding your role models and consuming their material and sharing their values and drive. Being around people of a similar nature in a physical space is just as important. Drive is infectious, particularly if the other person is in the same industry as you. You feel compelled to help them, but also keep up with them, since they are the right type of person you want to be around for your circumstance, they act as an accountability partner either actively, or passively. **Their drive, ambitions and professionalism brush off onto you.** This is why, in the beginning, finding the correct day job is key to growing yourself. Being around the right people for 8/9 hours of your day is crucial. If you are still working a day job, ask yourself, who are you hanging around with? The same goes for your close circle of friends. Are these the right types of people who are going to foster a creative and ambitious mindset? **What type of values and qualities in people do you want to be around?**
- **Take up a new skill and set a goal for it** – Separate from just practicing your secondary passions. There are a myriad of skills/hobbies you can take up to improve yourself. You could choose something that complements your primary passion. You will know what skills and hobbies these are for your own circumstance, for an example, you may be a designer who uses Illustrator and Photoshop, but you may wish to learn After Effects so you can animate your designs. These skills go hand in hand and directly benefit each other, depending on your knowledge and skill in the

same creative industry. Take up something brand new, learn the problems and skills required to overcome them. It could be a sport or activity. Something that gets you active and participating with other people, new people. It could be voluntary work, allowing you to feel fulfilled in helping others with their struggles. **By helping others, you are also helping yourself. It's immensely satisfying to help others.**

By developing new skills by setting goals for them, you're aiming to achieve more than you normally would. It keeps you accountable for your actions, particularly if you iterate in public. **Goals take you out of your comfort zone, forcing you to learn and grow as you overcome obstacles to get closer to the goal.** Work towards the goal every day. Some small effort you put in now, overtime surmounts to a large sum of work. What could you be doing with your time that is more important? What small task could you do today that gets you closer to your goal? **What's the one thing that will make the biggest difference at this moment in time?**

- **Be open to feedback and change** – As I mentioned above, I feel as though it's in a creatives' nature to be open to their ever-changing environment and to be constantly seeking new information, data, resources, apps, software, and other tools in their industry in a bid to improve their work. Consuming this type of information is a hobby in itself. Being aware of your changing environment is key to improving your skills and remaining relevant in your industry. If you are not open to change or being aware of trends, you may find yourself left behind in an ever evolving industry, while your skills stagnate. More than likely, there is some skill you learned 5 years ago, that you either don't use today, or is no longer relevant. **You can't be stubborn in any industry and expect to succeed.** If you're stubborn, and not open to critical thought, your work will not grow beyond your own scope. That being said, feedback should be sought by you, and not given to you without you seeking it. It has to be from trusted sources, someone who understands you, your values, and your circumstances. Feedback al-

lows you to be aware of others thought process and may bring to light, something you originally overlooked. **An outsiders view can give you an entirely new perspective.**

Of course, we don't have time to pursue everything we want to, we need balance in our lives, we can't hone all of our skills and improve every aspect at the same time. **Pick something that will make the most impact at this moment in time.**

Evaluate and assess which one thing will make the biggest impact to your life, your work, and your loved ones.

46: The Professional Process & Dealing with Clients

There are two types of people in the design industry. Technicians, those that do a job that they are told to do, and professionals, those that do a job that they tell themselves to do.

A professional is someone you seek when you have a problem that needs to be solved in the best, most effective way possible. **You aren't a professional unless you have a process.** A process is what you guide the client through when you're working with them. It's your means to solving the problems presented to you. It's how you do the work that you do, when you do it, why you're doing it, and how you conclude the work with the client.

Why would you hire a professional? Professionals are expensive, so shouldn't you save money and go for the cheapest option to cut costs for your business?

Professionals are people who position themselves as an expert at what they do. They are an investment. **A professional focusses their attention on solving the problems presented to them by the client,** and can also discover new problems that the client may have that they were unaware of. For a professional, the **conversation is never focussed on money.** Likewise, if a client approaches you and begins the conversation with the budget, this is a red flag and they are not the type of client you should be working with, as I mentioned before.

To consider yourself a professional, you need to have a process. **Establishing yours is essential to becoming a professional and positioning yourself as an investment to future clients.**

As a professional, you need to be approached by clients, not the other way around. If you chase clients, you are chasing the ones that you otherwise wouldn't work with. They are doing you the favour of being their client, because of this, there is no sense of obligation on their part because you offered your service to them, they didn't approach you.

The clients who will want to work with you will understand you, your process, and your values. **They will know because of your case studies, and your writing.** All of which is displayed on your website.

Case studies are the best way for you to find new clients. **They will be the ones who approach you because you have displayed your problem solving abilities in various scenarios through your case studies.** This is how you position yourself as an expert in your field. This is how you attract clients. At all time, you need to be good at what you do.

You have all these clients coming to you asking to work with you. How do you filter down to the good ones and how do you know which ones to say yes to? The best clients will position you as an investment and recognise your ability to solve problems. You filter these clients with your questionnaire/contact form. **The questions you ask on this form are crucial to filtering the ones you want to work with, and the ones who are wasting your time.**

A contact form should not be 'Name/Email/Message'. These questions aren't enough to distinguish the clients who are serious about their work and the ones who aren't ready for your services. This is where you ask serious questions about their intentions, their brand, the target market, what are they building, why they think you are the best person to help them. **That question is an opportunity for the client to iterate that you they understand your values and your process, and are willing to come under it.**

Now it's down to business. It's time for the actual work. You've had the initial conversation over email, the client sent you the brief, what they want from this project, what you are going to solve, how much your charging, when you expect the payment, the amount of time it will take to complete the project, what files/deliverables they need to send to you before you begin and what you need to sent to them when the work is complete. Ask them for any pre existing brand requirements, assets and guidelines to follow before you begin.

This is your responsibility, this is your work, so you can't blame the client for not being aware of these discrepancies. You are an expert in your area, and they are an expert in theirs. Refer to them when you need to get information that you may have overlooked initially.

You have handed them the agreement to sign, and you make them aware that you will be paid, in half the final amount, before the work begins. **Professionals get paid to work.**

When you complete the final piece of work is complete, inform the client. Let them know that the work is done, show them a preview, but **never send the final deliverables before you get paid the final half that your owed.** The client will pay fast. This approach cuts out any 'delay' that they may have with paying you. It's a sure-fire way to get paid.

When you get paid, you can't just box everything into the final email and leave. You still have to present your work to the client. Why you made the choices you did, the problems you solved and the obstacles you overcame. You need to present your objective problem solving decisions to the client.

Maintain the professional relationship at all times, you never know what they may say to another potential client or who they may send to you to avail of your services. **Good news travels slow, but bad news travels far.**

A Professional is responsible for every aspect project, even the things that go wrong. It's always your fault. You set the expectations and responsibilities, this is your domain, you know what you are talking about because you are an expert in your field. If something comes up that you didn't foresee, take responsibility for it. **A novice shuns responsibility and blames others, a professional assumes and seeks responsibility.**

This can be hard, because you risk looking like you don't now what you are talking about. While in fact, by taking responsibility, you maintain professionalism by understand that there is a problem that needs to be addressed and you show competence that you can address it, even if it was caused by you.

Professionalism is not just a mindset, it's a way of living, its how you present yourself and articulate your work. Establishing yourself as a professional allows you to charge more for your service, but you can't call yourself a professional in name, but without acting like it. You assume the responsibility of a professional, something that not everyone can do when they first start off, it takes yours to hone your process and define your professionalism.

What you can do is practice. Practice your work, get good at what you do, write case studies about personal projects and imagined clients. Anything that reflects real world problems that can be solved with your work. It takes a mature decision to start now.

Do you want to be a fiverr.com artist, lost in obscurity and originality, undercutting the next artist in a bid to be paid €5 for your cheap service? Or do you want to be an independent creator running your own business, capable of solving real problems for real clients, under your own professional terms where you charge what your worth?

It's your decision.

47: How to Construct & Personalise a Contact

We live in a connected world where it's easier than ever to contact and reach out to people, especially those of who we have never met. The avenues in which you allow people to contact you are experiences. For your fans and followers, and for businesses and clients who wish to work with and hire you. It's fundamental to your professionalism that you split up and guide these two different types of audience through the necessary route to contact you appropriately. Fans can reach you via Twitter for more casual encounters, or send emails for more personal questions and offhand problems they have that they want you to help solve.

But it's an entirely different case with clients who wish to work with you, it isn't a casual experience, this is where your professionalism with clients starts, even before you begin the initial conversation. **You need an area where potential clients can go to on your website to contact you specifically about working with you**, and also be funnelled through a questionnaire to discover if they are serious about their work, and yours.

Creating a questionnaire on your contact page is crucial to deciphering what client is the right client for you to work with. Appropriating the correct questions to ask is the most important step just before the initial conversation. This is where you decide whether they are the right client for you or not.

The questionnaire allows you to identify those who are serious about their work and wish to come under your process and see you as an authority in your field. It filters out the wrong type of client and allows you to build a relationship and set the foundation to a successful project. **Through the questions you ask them on your questionnaire, you will discover their needs,**

and what goals they wish to achieve by working with you. Remember, they are coming to you for a reason.

Realistically, if the client fills out your carefully curated questionnaire with in-depth answers about why they have arrived at you as being the person to solve their problem, they are serious about working with you. Although, you may get people who fill in your questions with one word answers, an obvious red flag in which you know to avoid. Which means they don't know why they are coming to you in the first place.

You need a contract when working with any client. The client is responsible for two things; The content for which they provide you to work with for the project, and the goals in which you will discover in the questions you ask the client on the questionnaire.

So what kind of questions do you include when you are constructing your questionnaire? **Firstly, you have to understand why you are asking these questions** and what the information the client responds with means in relation to discovering the objective design decisions you will make. If you don't know why your asking the questions, other than to sound professional, then why ask it? This will make you appear unprofessional in the long run and the client will recognise this.

If a question doesn't align with your process or you can't use the information you're receiving from the question, then don't ask it.

Good practice is to get examples and ideas from professionals questionnaires you find on their contact forms. Go to their website, see what work they do, what kind of questions they are asking that align with their style and type of work. The purpose of this is to discover the correlation between the type questions they ask and how they utilise this information in their artwork and case studies on their website and portfolios.

DO NOT carbon copy their questionnaire. If you believe that because they are already established as a professional, what they're asking must get them clients easier. So you reckon since it worked for them, it will work for you. It will not work for you. **You need to craft your own questionnaire. One that's personal to your process and how you work.**

One that meets your needs and will give you all the relevant information for you to progress smoothly with the project. Some questions you can consider;

- What does your business do? Why does it matter?
- Is it local/Global?
- Who is your target audience? What are their needs?
- Who are your competitors? What are you doing that's different?
- Do you have any examples of the artistic direction for the project?
- Any pre-existing brand requirements/colours?

You need the client to be as open as they can be about your questions, it's the only way you will know if they are serious about coming under your process and working with you as a professional and allow you to provide objective design solutions. **You set the expectations for the project, you let the client know what you will be doing.** Without expectations, you won't know what the client will be expecting of you to provide them and may lead to their disappointment somewhere down the line in the project.

Your questionnaire will need patching over time as you fine-tune the questions that need to be asked. When you're first starting out, there will be information you need in which you didn't ask it at the beginning in the questionnaire/initial conversation phase. It comes with practice and knowing your own process.

A questionnaires purpose is to filter out the clients that don't fit with

your values and are not willing to come under your process. The questions provide you with the goals and information to proceed with a successful project and allows you to set the expectations to the client. Project your values thorough your writing and case studies. **Convey your professionalism by acting like it.**

The worst thing you can have on your contact for is – “Name, Email, Message”. This is too broad. You need some sort of hurdle, so that the ones that are serious will need to do a bit of work in order to reach you. **The ones that are serious about your time, and theirs, are the ones that are going to go to the extra length to contact you.** The easier it is to contact you to work with you, the worse.

Your contact form and questionnaire have to be displayed on your website, as the first form of initiating the conversation and relationship. Be careful not to include too many or even convoluted questions, the more barriers you have up before people can get in contact with may deter some serious clients who wish to work with you and hinder you're conversion rate. Making the questions you ask the client even more important.

You're a professional. **You're not there to execute the clients subjective ideas.** Use your questionnaire to identify if this is what the client wants from you. You're there to provide them with an objective design solution to their problem based on their content and goals.

Constructing the questionnaire with this in mind can allow you to discover the clients who recognise you as a technician, there to follow their orders step by step, telling you what to do.

Careful thought and consideration must be put into the questions. Can you get the relevant information you need to determine if you want to work with this person from them in the most concise way possible?

Some points to consider when constructing your personal questionnaire;

Is is questionnaire too long/short?

Is the terminology understandable?

Is the client comfortable answering it?

Will I get any relevant information by asking this question?

48: What if I Have Multiple Passions?

What is a passion? Something you enjoy the act of doing, not the idea of doing. You have tried it and you enjoy it. It's something we are not afraid to protect, to learn and to grow. These are the things we embody in our very personality, we allow our passions to absorb us for the sheer enjoyment of pursuing greatness with the passion.

We are all good at many things, we all have multiple passions that we like to pursue, and for most of us, all at the same time. We broadcast what we are good at online. Our Instagrams and Twitters are filled with everything we enjoy and the various outlets we are pursuing at that particular moment. It's a stream of consciousness. We want everyone to know that we are good at many different skills and are capable of learning and executing many different pursuits at a basic level.

This is normal. We all have this desire to project the various pursuits we're following and outlets that we're skilled at. Having multiple passions is one of the greatest struggles a creative has. **There is nothing wrong with having multiple passions.**

If you are wondering why you're creating (in your eyes) great work, but not generating the traction you think you deserve for doing all of these pursuits, because you're working hard to populate your feeds with various pieces of work you produce, with no aim or form of curation for any of your work. **Don't be surprised if you never get traction or attention on your work or feed. People don't care how hard you work.**

You can't focus on multiple passions at one time. It's doing the other pas-

sions a disservice. It's doing your future audience a disservice, by not investing time into learning and growing the passion. **By not investing time into your passions with the aim to improve then you do all of your passions a disservice.**

In the business world, there is a stigma among young freelancers associated to multiple passions and knowing multiple skills. The stigma is backed up by standard college modules; "Don't put all your eggs in one basket". By knowing many different skills, you will be more desirable to business recruiters and land a job easier when you graduate. Then you realise real life doesn't work like that.

A business hires you because you are good at one thing. This one thing that you have dedicated your time to learning in-depth and you can demonstrate these skills with your curated portfolio and your case studies. When do you see someones job title in a business "Account Manager/Visual Designer/Human Relations"? You don't.

The idea that college operates its modules like this is not for you to become skilled at multiple outlets. It's aim was to allow you the time to discover if you liked this skill to further pursue it as a passion. This is why you only practice these modules for 3 months at a time, barely enough time to scratch the surface level of each skill. No time to allow yourself to explore more in-depth knowledge and professional insight.

If your aim is to become a recognised professional, to be known for something, you need to focus on one passion.

People need to be able to categorise you and your passion. For their own mind, they need to be able to put you in a box and label you so they know what you are about without using brain power. **People follow you for a reason. Your work is valuable and you have a sense of direction.** People want to

follow those who know what they are doing.

If you're wondering why people don't follow you online, or your audience is not growing, you need to pick one thing. If you're not ready to publicly commit to a certain passion because you feel that the passion isn't a good representation of your identity and your values. Either spend more time discovering what you like to do and which passions you enjoy more than the others.

Which passion embodies you're personality the most?

The best way to decide is pick one, any of them. The one you feel strongest about. The one you can dedicate the next couple of years to. If you pick one and instantly you know that you don't want to do it, then you're one step closer to discovering your true passion that you can start then and there. You will find with this approach that there will be passions that ultimately only the idea one of the passion was what you enjoy, not the actual act of doing it.

If you can't commit to something for 2 years, and turn up to it everyday, it's not a passion.

Do you love your passions enough to not do them the disservice of practicing them all right now? If you love the act of doing something, it can wait until you pursue the one passion you love the most right now.

Pick something and start. When you pick this passion, curate it on your social feeds. Dedicate time to learn it and become great at it. If you start and then realise that you didn't like it a few months down the line, you haven't failed, because now it's one more passion you know you don't want to pursue right now.

You can't do everything in the world. You can't do everything at once.

Don't do your audience, and yourself, the disservice of switching between passions anytime you wish. People follow you because you have something of value to offer, your audience comes to expect it of you.

Respect your audience. Respect yourself.

49: Pricing Your Services Based On Value

It's been a while since I discussed pricing. It was all the way back in Chapter 7, 'how to find your price'. It's long overdue to talk about one of the most practical topics there is to discuss. The topic of money and pricing your services.

In Chapter 7, I discussed how to find your hourly rate, but with value based pricing you need to consider the value of a piece of work you provide to your client. I am no longer talking about trading time for money. In taking the next step in your professional career, you need to price your products/services based on its value to the client.

Pricing on value is the next step to growing your business, freelancing, and professionalism. No longer are you only covering your bills and expenses based on an hourly rate, or your 'baseline'. Your baseline price covers your cost of expenses, the cost of running your business. Web hosting, email newsletter service, internet provider, various accounting / invoicing / digital storage, your rent/mortgage, household bills, electricity, gas, waste, water etc. and general unforeseen expenses. These are the typical costs that must be taken into account for anyone living in the 21st century. **When you begin freelancing, discover your baseline price by taking into account all of the above expenses by charging based on an hourly rate.**

When you're doing a project, you're not doing another. Take this into account when you're finding your 'baseline' price. With practice and after experience with clients and producing products, you can start to charge a higher rate, based on the value you're providing to your client or customers.

This is where value based pricing applies. **The value comes from the client.**

You need to identify the value to the client by forecasting what kind of monetary return they will see from your product / service.

In order to start charging your work based on value, you need to position the conversation around solving the problem, providing value and developing a relationship with the client. It's pivotal that the client doesn't see you as an expense. How do you do this? Ask questions.

Don't be afraid to ask questions, talk about how much they expect in returns from this project. Talking about money when you first begin freelancing and taking on clients is uncomfortable and seems intrusive. But these are just figures, it's business, businesses live and die on how much money they make. It's not intrusive, it's your responsibility to ask the right questions to the client, instead of running into a problem halfway through that could have been solved had you asked it at the beginning.

It's key to talk about how much money they can make, not how much money they can give [to you].

When you start freelancing with real clients and the subject of how much you charge comes up, your first thought is to protect the client. You don't want them to get "deer in the headlights" syndrome. Meaning, you're afraid to tell the client your rates out of fear that they will freeze up and become hesitant in proceeding with the project, scaring them away. So you consciously lower your rate out of fear of this. Lower than what they should be.

This is wrong. **If the client doesn't want to work with you because your rates are 'too high', then that's their problem.** You have your rate for a reason, you're good at what you do. Be confident in what you charge, and be comfortable talking about it. **This is your area of expertise, you're a professional in this field, this is your livelihood.** When you find the right client for you, through your questionnaire, one that is willing to come under your

process and recognises your professionalism. You have no idea how much a client is willing to pay for your service. What you thought was high, could be a fraction of what they were willing to pay. Don't be afraid to charge more for your service. Ask the client questions;

- What kind of returns are you expecting to see from this project / campaign?
- What can I create that solves a problem for you?
- Why did you consider me? What value do you think I can offer to you?

You need to be good at what you do in order to price your products or services based on value. You need to hold yourself in a professional manner, know your field of expertise in order to set goals and execute them for them client. **Convey the unique value you have to offer to the client.** Why would a client hire you? Would you hire yourself?

Position yourself as an investment. Not as a commodity. Don't be afraid to charge more.

People will always undercut you and charge less. This doesn't matter, because a client that doesn't want to work with you in favour of someone who charges less is not the type of client you want to work with. Changes, unhappy with the design or direction, subjective views and judgements, general hassle, telling you what to do and treating you like a technician. **These are the calling card of a bad client, but only bad designers take them on.**

Be confident and competent about your work and when your proposing your rate to the client. If you tip-toe and stutter around the price of your service, it will lower its perceived value because it seems like you are not confident in your ability.

Clients come to you as a professional. They want someone who knows what

they are doing. A client knows their business, and you know yours. Don't be afraid to show them that. When you're talking to clients and establishing the relationship, they already know you're a professional through your proven track record, ie. your case studies and your writing. **They will know you have unique value to offer them through your work and with the problems you solve. Professionals don't have to be managed.**

Who goes to a professional and has to manage them? Checking in to see how they are doing, if they are doing it right. You visit a doctor or a mechanic because you have a problem that needs to be solved. When do you tell them what to do?

Low-bidders who undercut your rate and charge little to nothing are saturating the creative industry. Providing entry-level solutions where they take on clients from hell that tell them what to do from start to finish. These people aren't professionals. They are only interested in money.

Do you really want to be considered on the same level as this? Think of the artists you follow on Instagram and Twitter, do you think they charge as low as them? **You follow those people for a reason. They are good at what they do, and they charge for the value that they provide.**

If you charge more, it increases the perceived value of the work and your services. If a client contracts multiple designers for a project and receives a logo worth €500 and one worth €3,000, which one do you think they are going to use? Of course the more expensive one, because it possesses a greater perceived value through the eyes of the client in the sense that "we paid more money for this, so it must be better", which is not necessarily true.

This is why you shouldn't be afraid to increase your rates and charge the client based on the value they will see from it. **Double your rates. Charge for your knowledge and expertise, not per the hour.**

50: Do What Makes You Happy

The internet has levelled the playing field. Whatever our interests or whims can be searched and consumed from our own pockets. It's hard not to be overwhelmed by so many interesting avenues and different pursuits you can try all at once. It's mind-boggling. We have access to all the information we could ever want. If you want to meet new people, improve a skill, start a hobby, learn something new. All can be done quicker than ever before, with more content in those fields than ever before. We take for granted so much that we use and have access to on a daily basis.

It's important to take a step back, switch off for a moment, and ask yourself if you are doing what makes you happy?

I talk about pursuing your passions a lot on this book, in fact, it originally started as a weekly challenge to write about my experiences, insights, professionalism and help young creatives on the path to finding their passion while setting expectations about the creative and freelance industry. I reached 50 posts (which are the chapters of this book), which was 1 a week for 50 weeks straight. I never missed 1 post. That's a big achievement, but many entrepreneurs and creatives that I know of find it hard to celebrate the small victories. It's because they see the mistakes, they see the opportunities for improvement. This is what they lived for, for how ever long they took to accomplish it. There's always more to be done when you're working for yourself, because you're the one that benefits, not an employer.

You reap the rewards, so you always strive for perfection. But is this human? Nobody is perfect. Are you happy in the act of doing something, or are you happy with the idea of it?

Do you pursue your passion for the hope that it will get a lot of likes on social media or go viral? Or do you pursue it because it makes you happy when you do?

It's important to celebrate the little victories. Looking forward to a week ahead of working on your passion is what should fuel you. If it doesn't, then it may not be a passion. Do you come home from your day job, excited to work for the next few hours on it? This is how I felt with writing my series of 50 posts.

Each week I would think of a different struggle that I, or other creatives or friends, had or maybe it was something I heard or read that week that sparked an idea. The start of each week was the most exciting, researching and formulating my thoughts and experiences with the topic, then on Thursday, I would spend the evening writing the topic for Sundays' post. **Not everything you write will make the cut.** Saturdays came the artwork for the post, sketching, concepting and then creating it digitally and optimising it for various social media platforms. Followed by Sunday when I would post it at 5pm.

The entire process took up my week, it was concise and I began to get the timing perfectly. This was something I did outside of my day job, this was something I loved to do. Although at times, excruciating, when you find it hard to write about a topic or generate ideas. **With public commitment, came my dedication to show up. When you show up, you get work done.**

I started writing these posts a year ago, when I realised that I wasn't happy with my professional work. When I finished my day job, I would have nothing to fall back on and show people, something to show what I do, what I specialise in, what I love and what I'm known for. I wanted my work to be considered on a professional level, and at the beginning of 2014 I didn't have that, despite freelancing for friends, family and acquaintances since 2010.

I wanted to learn a new skill, something that would benefit my skills as a designer, something specialised to create a portfolio. I loved lettering and designing badges, particularly vintage-inspired. When searching for related articles I came across some blogs, articles, books and podcasts about entrepreneurship and professionalism. Terms I thought were fluff. But after reading and listening for a month while gathering information about learning a new skill in design and typography, I was hooked.

The topics that these artists, writers and producers discussed, fueled the fire. **They were struggles that directly related to my situation. They were solving problems, my personal problems.** I could relate directly to what they were saying, and they told me how to solve these problems. I consumed everything I could on the topics of business, entrepreneurship, professionalism, productivity, creativity, and motivation. **I was a self-help addict, and I was happy.**

This was the spark that I needed to get my professional affairs in order. It was after months of consuming and preparing my mindset, that I began pursuing design full-time again. The material I was listening to and consuming catapulted my confidence in my work and in my professionalism with my clients. I started taking clients again, outside of my day job. I was doing the 2 things I love the most;

- Designing vintage-inspired logos and badges for clients who respected my work.
- Writing about my own experiences with clients, and techniques for improving productivity and creativity.

Something clicked when I was consuming this type of content. I was around like-minded people who also had these struggles and had a solution for them. **They told you practical ways to better your work and yourself.**

They teach you how to be happy in yourself.

I'm not talking about clichéd advice and motivational posters you see on Facebook. I'm talking about tangible insights in productivity and creativity from like-minded people with the same problems, in places that foster a good relationship with others. **All it took was the decision to start. Start today, you won't regret it tomorrow.**

It's hard when you don't know what your passion is. Maybe you're afraid of going in the wrong direction. Don't be afraid, when you fail, you fail forward, you now know that it's something you don't want to pursue. It took me years to find out what I love doing, something I could dedicate time to and watch it grow.

Don't think that you are stuck with this one thing that you decide to start at, if it's something that doesn't make you happy doing, you don't have to do it. If it's something that you grow out of, that you now no longer enjoy the act of doing. **You can move on, you can evolve to something else, keep the drive, but shift your focus to your new pursuit.**

It's easy to get swept away by all the beautiful artwork and excellently crafted productions in the creative industry. This happens because that person dedicated a lot of time to become great in their field. **This will be you, if you focus your time, and dedicate yourself fully to your passion.**

You have to understand that no one person is doing everything. Nor can they do everything. If you haven't found your passion yet, experiment, try new things, do what you think you may enjoy. If you have just started pursuing a passion, it's harder to avoid 'Shiny Object Syndrome', where you want to continue trying new pursuits because you've seen something you really enjoyed online and thought you would enjoy doing that too. Don't get carried away. The problem with 'sos' is that you're seeing the finished product in its

perfect state, without the hard work that has gone into it, the backbreaking labour that it took the artist to create the piece.

You're only in love with the idea of the passion, not the act of doing it.

The act may not make you happy, it's all a facade. Do what you know makes you happy first and foremost. Despite how much money or publicity it may get you.

With our constant exposure to the work through the internet, it's important to remember to be human too. It's all too easy to get swept away in the lives of who we are following. We are following them for a reason, they are great at what they do, that's the reason you know them in the first place. They have made a name for themselves. Everyone's circumstance is different.

- Are you spending enough time with your partner, spouse, kids, friends?
- Are you experiencing different facets of life, trying new things, activities, foods, cultures, hobbies.
- Are you enjoying the world for what it is, nature, travelling, seeing new places and meeting new people?

Most importantly, are you happy in what you are doing, what you are creating? Are you proud of your work? Are you building a legacy, something that someone will remember you for? Are you aiming to become healthier, spending more time to yourself, relaxing, doing what you love?

There is more to life than working. I realised that even more from creating this book. I talk about freelancing and your passion a lot. But being around those who foster your happiness and experiencing different outlets in life is the most important. What's the most important thing you can do now that will make you happy? Be it a large task or small, Do it even if it involves taking a chance.

The world is defined by those who risk it.

Thanks for reading.

If your interested in reaching out or discussing a topic further, send me a mail; hello@jamesbutterly.com

I'm also on Twitter; [@DJamesbutterly](https://twitter.com/DJamesbutterly)

