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FROM SOLO TO STARTUP SUCCESS

The Freelancer to Startup Toolkit

A practical, visual guide that helps young freelancers turn irregular, informal work into a structured, sustainable business, with real frameworks, activities and a next step on every page.





KLUB PODJETNIŠKEGA GIBANJA EMC · EduMansha – Associação · Asociacija Aktyvistai

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

What is SHIFT?

SHIFT, From Solo to Startup Success helps young sole proprietors move from informal self-employment toward sustainable startups and job creation.

It is an **Erasmus+ Small-scale Partnership in Youth**, built for young freelancers, especially NEETs, migrants and under-represented young people, and for the youth workers who support them. This **Freelancer-to-Startup Toolkit** is one of its core results: an open, modular learning resource of six practical modules.



6	4	3
practical modules	languages	partner countries

Created by the SHIFT partnership

KLUB PODJETNIŠKEGA GIBANJA EMC
Slovenia

EduMansha – Associação
Portugal

Asociacija Aktyvistai
Lithuania

A partnership across Slovenia, Portugal and Lithuania. Full partner details and contacts are published at shift.elnlab.eu.

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shift.elnlab.eu

Open, practical and free to adapt, built with young freelancers, for young freelancers.

WELCOME

From surviving to building

Self-employment gives many young people a first income, but too often it stays fragile and hand-to-mouth. Most freelancers don't struggle because they lack talent. They struggle because **no one ever showed them how to turn scattered gigs into a business that lasts.**



SHIFT changes that. This toolkit takes the young freelancer step by step, from "I take whatever work comes" to **"I run something on purpose"**, in plain language, with real frameworks they fill in for their own situation, and a concrete next action on every page.

① Locate yourself

See exactly where you stand today and name your single most useful next step.

② Build the structure

Turn improvised freelancing into pricing, offers and systems that don't depend on luck.

③ Grow on your terms

Move from selling hours toward income that scales, without losing control.

Who this is for

- **Early-stage sole proprietors** who want to grow, but lack business language and confidence.
- **NEETs**, young people who turned to freelancing to survive, without the skills to make it sustainable.
- **Migrants & Roma youth** facing socio-economic barriers, often outside formal business networks.
- **Youth workers & mentors** who support them, who get a ready-to-run, non-formal curriculum.

No business background needed

Every framework is written in plain words and assumes no prior business education. Where a concept risks feeling abstract, facilitator notes show how to ground it in the learner's real situation.

SHIFT turns scattered gigs into a business that lasts, one honest next step at a time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The learning journey · six modules

Five themes of the SHIFT project map into six practical modules. They build on each other, but each also stands alone. Every module has concept pages, facilitator-led (F) and self-directed (S) activities, a case study and a resource library. **Click any module to jump straight to it.**

1 **Mapping Your Path** Module 1
Locate yourself, model your whole business on one page, find your niche and productize your offer.
Open → ~3 hrs

2 **Test It for Real** Module 2
Test a real service cheaply with Build–Measure–Learn, customer discovery and everyday AI.
Open → ~3 hrs

3 **Money That Lasts** Module 3
Read your money honestly, price with confidence, keep a reserve and decide with a rule.
Open → ~3 hrs

4 **Winning Clients** Module 4
Turn conversations into clients, and sell by understanding the problem, not by pressuring.
Open → ~3 hrs

5 **Being Seen** Module 5
Build a personal brand and visibility, and get found and remembered by the right people.
Open → ~4 hrs

6 **You Belong Here** Module 6
Grow identity, belonging and resilience, recognise your value and take ownership of your path.
Open → ~10 hrs

New to SHIFT? Start with Module 1 · Mapping Your Path, the map for everything that follows.

HOW TO USE IT

Built to be run, not just read

Each module is a facilitator's companion. Read it first, then run it in **short loops**: introduce one framework, let participants apply it to their own work for 10–15 minutes, then discuss. Never present two frameworks without an application in between, and make sure every section ends in an action the learner writes down.



Markers to watch for

Facilitator-led
Run with a group, in short loops

Self-directed
Learner works solo, on their own case

Try this
A quick exercise linked to an activity

Facilitator watch-out
Common traps to steer around

Youthpass
The competence this builds, to capture

Each module contains

- Facilitator-led (F) and self-directed (S) activities, the number varies by module
- Concept pages with keep-able infographics
- A case study & a resource library
- Around 3 hours of facilitated work for most modules (Module 6 is longer, ~10 hours)

Youthpass & recognition

Every module ends in reflection, where loose learning becomes a competence the young person can name and carry. This is the heart of the Youthpass process, and each module flags the key competence to capture (usually entrepreneurship and personal / learning-to-learn).

Localised for Portugal, Lithuania & Slovenia

Country-specific content, legal forms, VAT thresholds, registration points and funding routes, is built into each module for all three SHIFT countries, so you can teach the real local picture, not a generic one.

Read it, then run it. Every section should end with the learner writing down one concrete action.

MODULE ONE

Mapping Your Path

01

Business modelling & productization, locate yourself on the journey, then structure your work into a business.

This module is the map for everything that follows. Most freelancers don't fail for lack of talent, they fail because they **can't see where they are**, where they could go, or how the pieces of their work fit together. Module 1 fixes that.



By the end, a participant can

- Locate themselves on the freelancer journey and name their most useful next step.
- Map their whole business on one page, and describe their niche in one sentence.
- Choose a direction on purpose, and turn a service into a structured, repeatable offer.

⏱ ~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | 🌍 Localised · PT · LT · SI | Youthpass · Entrepreneurship

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · The Freelancer Journey
2 · Your business on one page (Canvas)
3 · Finding your niche
4 · Freelancer to startup: a spectrum
5 · Which kind of business do you want?
6 · Productizing your service
7 · Five ways a freelancer earns
8 · The Strategy Canvas (draw a different curve)
9 · The Positioning Map (own the empty space)
10 · The Value Proposition Canvas

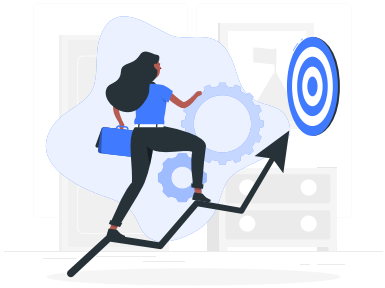
ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Map Your Journey, 45 min
F2 · One-Page Canvas Jam, 75 min
F3 · Niche & Promise Lab, 60 min
S1 · Find Your Niche, 30 min
S2 · Climb One Rung, 40 min
+ Resource library & templates

KNOW YOUR STAGE

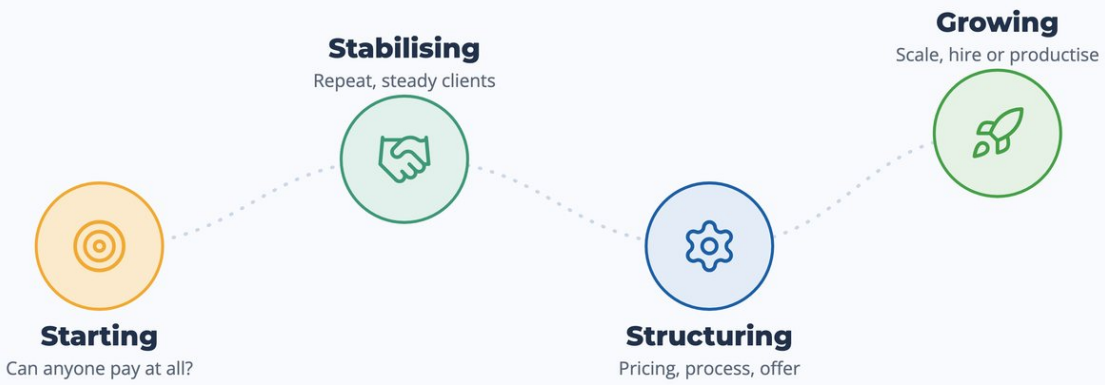
The freelancer journey

Almost every freelancer believes they are either “doing fine” or “failing”, with nothing in between. In reality, building a business is a journey with recognisable stages, and knowing which one you are in tells you which problems are worth solving now, and which are just a distraction.



The Freelancer Journey

Four stages — know your stage and you know which problem to solve now.



You can sit in different stages for different services at once — that is normal.

Four honest stages

Starting is about proof, Stabilising about rhythm, Structuring about systems, Growing about scale. You can sit in different stages for different services at once.

Solve the right problem

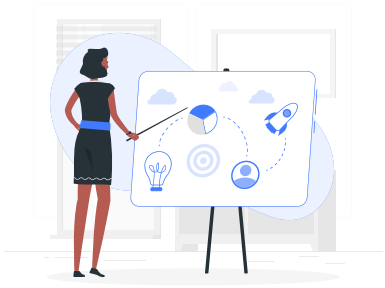
Naming your stage protects you from polishing a logo while you still have no paying client. It points to the one task that actually matters this month.

Know your stage, and you always know which problem is worth solving now, and which is just a distraction.

YOUR BUSINESS ON ONE PAGE

The Business Model Canvas

The most useful single tool in this module, but the standard version quietly assumes a team, investors and a product. This version keeps all nine blocks and rewrites each one for a freelancer, so you can see your whole business, how you create value, reach people, get paid and keep going, on one page.



Your Business on One Page

The freelancer Business Model Canvas — fill the right side first, then work back left.

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Proposition	Client Relationship	Client Segments
Allies who help you deliver	The core work you do	The result you create	How you keep clients	One specific client

Key Resources
Skills, tools, portfolio

Channels
How clients find you

Cost Structure
Include a 'quiet months' line

Revenue Streams
Day-rate · project · retainer · product

Right side first

Fill the customer-facing blocks first: who you help, the value you create, how you reach them. The left side (activities, resources, costs) only makes sense once the right side is clear.

One quiet-month line

Add a cost line for the lean months. A freelancer's model isn't honest until it survives a slow month, not just a good one.

Your whole business fits on one page. Fill the right side first, then work back, and read it as one connected system.

BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Finding your niche

A niche is not a smaller market, it is a sharper one. When you try to serve everyone, your offer sounds generic and is easy to forget. When you name one kind of client and one problem you solve better than most, your work becomes easy to recommend, and easier to price.



Finding Your Niche

Your strongest offer lives where three honest answers overlap.



"I help [who] who struggle with [problem] to [result]."

Sharper, not smaller

A niche is a positioning choice, not a limit. You can always widen later, from a position of strength.

Where the money is

The overlap only works if the problem is one people will pay to solve. A niche with no money in it is a hobby.

Write one sentence: "I help [who] who struggle with [problem] to [result]." If you can't finish it, you haven't chosen yet.

GO LEGIT, STEP BY STEP

Freelancer to startup: a spectrum

Becoming a business is not one scary leap from cash-in-hand to a full company. It is a spectrum of small steps, each one trading a little freedom for a little more protection, credibility and access to bigger clients. You move along it when the benefit is worth the cost, not before.



Freelancer to Startup: a Spectrum

Small steps — each trades a little freedom for a little protection and credibility.

more freedom → *more protection & credibility*

Informal / cash — **Registered self-employed** — **Sole proprietor** — **Simple company** — **Full company**

How it works in each SHIFT country

	Portugal	Lithuania	Slovenia
Simplest status	Trabalhador independente	Individuali veikla	Samostojni podjetnik (s.p.)
Company form	Soc. Unipessoal (Lda)	Mažoji bendrija (MB)	d.o.o.
VAT-exempt up to	€15,000 / yr	€45,000 / yr	€60,000 / yr
Register at	eportugal.gov.pt	registrucentras.lt	spot.gov.si

Good to know

Legal forms, thresholds and registration points are current as of 2025 (standard regime). They change with national law — check the official portal above before teaching a figure.

One step at a time

You rarely need to jump to a full company. Most young freelancers gain the most from just the first one or two steps, registering, then a simple status.

Country reality

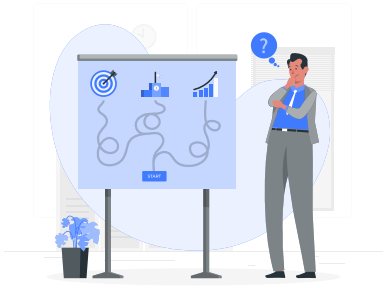
The exact names, thresholds and portals differ across Portugal, Lithuania and Slovenia. The diagram shows the real local forms, not a generic sketch.

Move along the spectrum one step at a time, and only when the protection you gain is worth the freedom you trade.

TWO HONEST PATHS

Which kind of business do you want?

Neither path is better, but they lead to different decisions. The Niche Specialist grows by becoming more valuable, not bigger, deeper expertise, higher rates, a handful of ideal clients. The Growth Builder grows by adding capacity, systems, a team, products that sell without them in every chair. Knowing which you want changes everything that follows.



Which Kind of Business?

Neither is better — but knowing which shapes every later decision.

The Niche Specialist

- More valuable, not bigger
- Deeper expertise, higher rates
- A handful of ideal clients

The Growth Builder

- Grows by adding capacity
- Systems, a team, products
- Sells without you in every chair

Value vs capacity

Specialists get paid more for the same hours; Builders escape the hours by building systems. Both are valid, they just optimise different things.

Choose on purpose

Most freelancers drift into one by accident and quietly resent it. Choosing deliberately means every later decision finally points the same way.

Neither archetype is better. Knowing which one you actually want turns every later decision from a guess into a choice.

SELL A PACKAGE, NOT YOUR HOURS

Productizing your service

Selling hours caps your income at the hours you can work, and makes every sale a fresh negotiation. Productizing turns your service into a clear, named, fixed-scope, fixed-price package, easier to explain, easier to buy, and easier to raise the price of, without selling more of your life.



The Productizing Ladder

Climb from trading hours toward income that scales — keep the lower rungs too.

more leverage

- **Productised & recurring** — Templates, retainers, courses
- **Packaged offer** — Set scope, set price
- **Fixed-price project** — Work faster, keep the gain
- **Hourly / day-rate** — Time stops, income stops

From hours to offers

A package removes the awkward "how much?" dance. The client sees a defined scope and one price, and simply says yes or no.

A ladder of offers

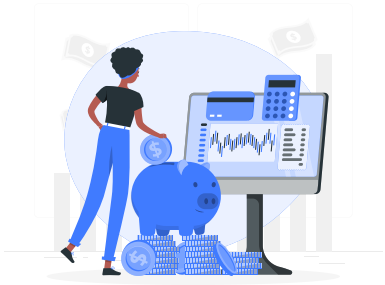
Stack a small entry offer, a core package and a premium version. Clients choose their level, and you stop quoting every job from scratch.

Turn your service into a named package with a fixed scope and price. It's easier to buy, easier to price, and it stops you selling your hours.

CHOOSE HOW YOU GET PAID

Five ways a freelancer earns

How you make money is a design choice, not a fixed fact of your trade. The same skill can be sold as a day rate, a per-project price, a productized package, a retainer, or a digital product, and combining two or three means a quiet month in one is cushioned by another.



Five Revenue Models

Combine two or three, so a quiet month in one is cushioned by another.

Day-rate
paid for your time

Project
a fixed price per job

Retainer
a monthly ongoing fee

Product
a fixed package

Digital
a course or download

No single model is safest. Two or three together smooth out the quiet months.

Mix, don't marry

Relying on a single revenue model, all day-rate, or all one client, makes a slow month a crisis. Two or three independent streams smooth the income out.

Different work, different money

Day rates are simple but cap your income; retainers give predictability; products scale but take upfront effort. Match the mix to the life you want.

How you get paid is a choice. Combine two or three revenue models so a quiet month in one is cushioned by another.

STAND OUT ON PURPOSE

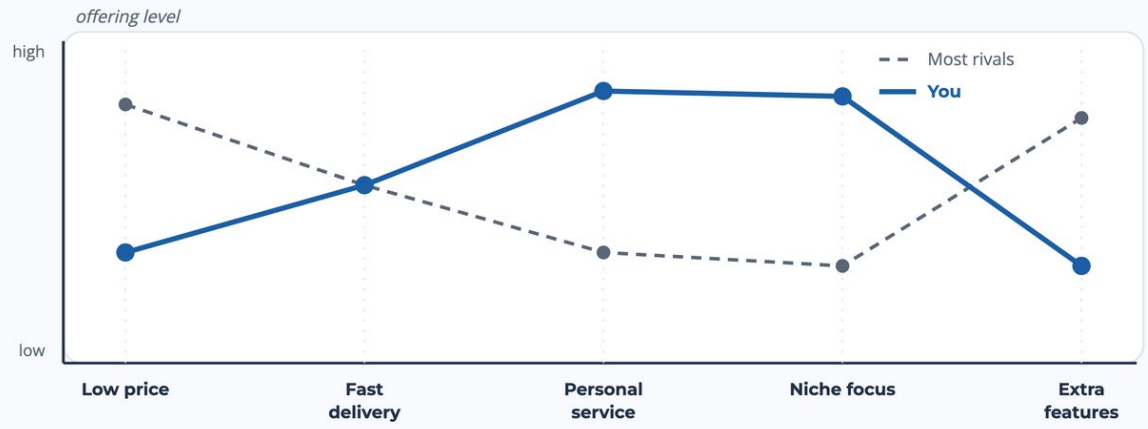
The strategy canvas

Instead of guessing how to be different, you draw it. The strategy canvas plots the factors your clients care about, price, speed, quality, personal attention, and lets you see at a glance where you match every rival and where you deliberately break away. Standing out becomes a design decision, not a hope.



The Strategy Canvas

Win by drawing a different value curve, not a higher one.



ELIMINATE what clients don't value

REDUCE below the standard

RAISE above the standard

CREATE something genuinely new

See the sameness

Plotting rivals usually reveals that everyone competes on the same few factors. That sameness is your opportunity, not your ceiling.

Raise, create, drop

You stand out by dialling some factors down, others up, and adding one nobody else offers, not by being better at everything.

Draw your value curve against rivals. You stand out by choosing where to break away, not by trying to beat everyone at everything.

OWN THE EMPTY SPACE

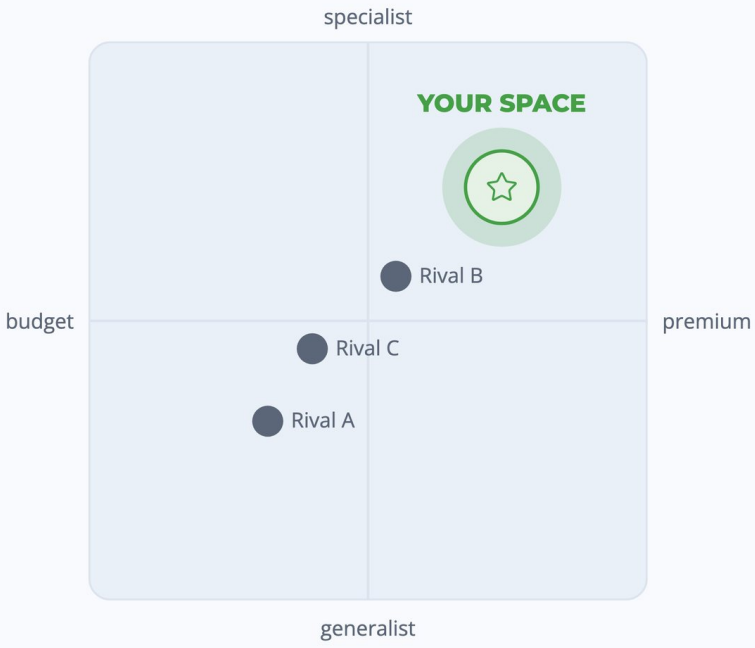
The positioning map

A positioning map plots your market on two axes that matter to clients, say affordable-to-premium and generalist-to-specialist, and shows where everyone already sits. The crowded corners are price wars; the empty space, if clients actually want what lives there, is where you can be the obvious, uncontested choice.



The Positioning Map

Plot rivals, then own a spot no one holds.



Find the gap

When you plot rivals honestly, they cluster. An empty quadrant is a candidate position, as long as real clients want what would live there.

Empty isn't always valuable

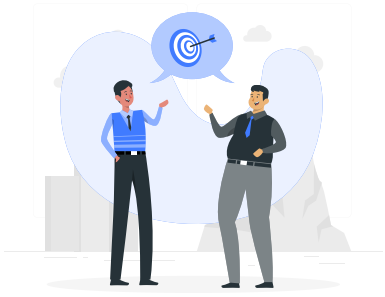
Some gaps are empty because nobody wants them. Test that the space you're eyeing has paying demand before you plant your flag.

Plot the market on two axes clients care about, then own an empty space that clients actually want, not just any gap.

FIT YOUR OFFER TO THEIR WORLD

The value proposition canvas

It's easy to build an offer you love that clients don't want. The value proposition canvas prevents that: on one side you map your client's real jobs, pains and gains; on the other, how your offer relieves those pains and creates those gains. When the two sides line up, you have fit, and fit is what people pay for.



The Value Proposition Canvas

Design the 'fit' between the client's world and your offer. Map the right side first.

YOUR OFFER

- **Products & services** — what you provide
- **Pain relievers** — how you remove pains
- **Gain creators** — how you create gains

FIT

CLIENT'S WORLD

- **Jobs** — what they need done
- **Pains** — what they want to avoid
- **Gains** — what they hope for

Their world first

Start with the client's jobs, pains and gains, not your features. An offer designed from their side sells itself; one designed from yours needs convincing.

Fit, then features

Only add a feature if it kills a real pain or creates a real gain. Everything else is effort the client won't pay for.

Map the client's jobs, pains and gains first, then shape your offer to fit them. Fit is what people actually pay for.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Map Your Journey

45 min

Exercise & guided discussion

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 1 · The Freelancer Journey.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Locate each of their services on the journey, and name one concrete next step that moves their most important service forward.

Step by step

1. **Warm-up** · 5 min

   Ask: "what does having a business mean to you?" Collect a few words. Introduce the idea that it's a journey with stages, not an on/off switch.

2. **Show the map** · 5 min

   Walk through the four stages in plain words. Repeat clearly: no stage is failure, Starting is a real, named stage.

3. **Place yourself** · 10 min

   Each person writes one sticky note per service and sticks it on the stage that fits. Encourage several notes, you can be in different stages for different work.

4. **Pair share** · 10 min

   In pairs, explain your placements. Each partner asks the key question: "what would move this note one step to the right?"

5. **Name the next step** · 10 min

   On the back of their most important sticky note, each person writes their single next action.

6. **Commit & close** · 5 min

   A few volunteers say their next step aloud. Hand out the Journey infographic to keep.

THE FRAMEWORK

You can sit in different stages for different services at the same time, that is normal.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

One large printed Journey poster (A1) or flipchart; sticky notes and a pen per person; the Journey infographic as a take-home.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print/draw the four-stage journey big. Read sub-chapter 1. Prepare one everyday "stages" example (e.g. learning to drive) to warm up.

Facilitator tips

For low-confidence learners or NEETs, open with the non-business example to lower the stakes. Validate informal, cash work as a legitimate "Starting" stage. Keep placements on private sticky notes, watch for shame, keep the tone light.

→ What can I do next?

Write your one next step with a date, and put it somewhere you'll see it every day this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which stage am I in, and what is my one next step? What surprised me about where my work actually sits? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can locate myself on the journey and plan a realistic next step."

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • One-Page Canvas Jam

75 min

Hands-on exercise

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 2 & 10 · The Business Model Canvas + starting from the client's problem.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Fill a one-page business model for their own work, starting from clients and value, and identify the single block they most need to strengthen.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   One page = your whole business. Show the worked example briefly, then put it away.
2. **Right side first** · 20 min
   Fill three blocks only: Who it's for, Your promise, How money comes in. Circulate and prompt.
3. **Pressure-test the promise** · 10 min
   In pairs, ask each other "so that what?" until the promise describes a result, not a service.
4. **Left side** · 20 min
   Now fill What you do, What you have, Key allies and What it costs.
5. **Gallery walk** · 15 min
   Post canvases on the wall. Everyone adds one sticky of helpful feedback to two other canvases.
6. **Close** · 5 min
   Each person names the one block they'll improve first.

THE FRAMEWORK

Order matters: fill the three right-hand blocks before you touch the left side.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

A printed blank freelancer canvas (A3/A2) per person; sticky notes; markers; one worked example on a flipchart.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print the canvases. Read sub-chapters 2 and 10. Prepare a simple worked example (a fictional local freelancer) to show structure without giving answers.

Facilitator tips

If a learner freezes, let them copy the worked example and adapt it. For creatives, encourage drawing and icons. For limited literacy or non-native speakers, allow icons, first language, or speaking answers aloud. Watch for "my client is everyone."

→ What can I do next?

Pick your weakest block and take one small action to strengthen it this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which block is my strongest, and which is weakest? What did filling the right side first reveal? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can describe my whole business on one page."

★ Expert extension

Zoom into the promise with the Value Proposition Canvas: map the client's jobs, pains and gains against your offer, and cut anything that doesn't answer a real pain or gain.

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Niche & Promise Lab

60 min

Peer interview & role-play

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 3 & 9 · Finding your niche + a standout identity.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Surface a real niche from their best past work and craft a one-sentence promise a stranger can understand and repeat.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   A niche makes you a clearer choice, not a smaller one. People recommend what they can describe.
2. **Interview, round 1** · 15 min
   Partner A interviews B about their best-ever paid job: who was the client, what was the problem, what result? B answers; A listens and notes.
3. **Swap** · 15 min
   Now B interviews A the same way.
4. **Draft the promise** · 10 min
   Each person completes: "I help [client] who struggle with [problem] to [result]."
5. **Test it** · 10 min
   Say your promise to your partner. They reflect back what they heard. Refine until it's instantly clear.
6. **Close** · 5 min
   Volunteers say their promise aloud to the group.

THE FRAMEWORK

Your niche sits where what you do best, one client, and a valuable problem overlap.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Printed interview cards & promise builder (I help ___ who struggle with ___ to ___); pens.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print the prompt cards and templates. Read sub-chapters 3 and 9. Decide pairings in advance if some learners are shy.

Facilitator tips

For shy learners the interview format is a gift, their partner draws it out. For migrants, draft in first language first, then translate together. Watch for vague promises, push for one client, one problem, one result.

→ What can I do next?

Use your promise sentence, word for word, on your profile and when you introduce yourself this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

Could a stranger understand who I help and why? What did I learn about my own work by being interviewed? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + communication, "I can describe the value I create in one clear sentence."

★ Expert extension

Find your standout space with a Positioning Map: pick two axes your clients care about, plot local rivals, and place your own dot in the empty space no one else holds.

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Reflection worksheet

S1 • Find Your Niche

Your strongest offer lives where three honest answers overlap. You don't invent a niche, you notice the one already in your best work.

1. **List five paid jobs**
   Or fewer, include unpaid or hobby work that felt like your best.
2. **Circle one**
   The job you enjoyed most and were paid best for.
3. **Answer three questions**
   What did I do best? Who exactly was the client? What valuable problem did I solve?
4. **Write your niche**
   In the overlap of those three answers.
5. **Sense-check**
   Would you want more of this work, and could you find more clients like that one?



→ Next

Write: “My niche is helping [client] with [problem].” Then find one place those clients gather, online or locally.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

What's the thread connecting my best work, and what did fixing the scope and price make clearer?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~40 min · Design exercise

S2 • Climb One Rung

Selling hours has a hard ceiling. Packaging your expertise into a fixed, repeatable offer is how income grows without simply working more.

1. **Pick one service**
   One you currently sell by the hour or per custom job.
2. **Find your rung**
   Locate it on the Productizing Ladder.
3. **Design the next rung**
   Turn it into a named package: a name, exactly what's included, one clear price.
4. **Choose a revenue model**
   Time · project · retainer · productized · digital, pick the best fit.
5. **Write the one-line pitch**
   For your package.



→ Next

Offer your new package to one real client this week, or list it clearly on your profile.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

What's the thread connecting my best work, and what did fixing the scope and price make clearer? **Youthpass:** "I can recognise the value in my own work and package it into a repeatable offer."

CASE STUDY

DesignJoy: one designer, a productized service

Brett Williams was a graphic designer doing what most freelancers do, writing proposals, negotiating a price for every project, and firefighting scope creep. It paid the bills, but it did not scale, and it burned him out.

In 2017 he tried something different. Instead of selling custom projects by the hour, he packaged his design work into a single **productized offer, DesignJoy**: one flat monthly price, unlimited design requests, delivered one task at a time in 24–48 hours. Fixed price, fixed scope, a systemised way of working, clients drop requests into a shared board, and saved templates keep delivery fast.

He needed no investors and no team. He built a simple one-page website, launched it on **Product Hunt**, and shared his progress openly on Indie Hackers. A single viral post nearly doubled his monthly revenue almost overnight.

Today DesignJoy is a **one-person business, no employees, no contractors**, earning over $1 million a year, while Brett works a normal day. He got there not by taking on more clients or more hours, but by turning a custom service into a **repeatable, recurring product**.

Sources: usefreelance.com · starterstory.com · designjoy.co. Facilitator tip: pair it with a **local** freelancer's story from your own community.



THE MODULE 1 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Freelancer Journey, restructuring →**
- **Productizing the service →**
- **Revenue models, a subscription →**
- **Standing out, a different offer →**

What you can borrow from this story, at any size

1 Package a repeatable offer

One name, one scope, one price, instead of quoting every job from scratch.

2 Systemise delivery

A simple request board and saved templates keep quality high and your time low.

3 Build in public

Sharing your progress openly, Indie Hackers, LinkedIn, is free marketing that compounds.

He didn't earn more by working more hours, he packaged one service into a repeatable, recurring product.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything a facilitator or learner needs to go further with Module 1. The **printable templates are built into this toolkit** (next pages) and also downloadable at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- One-Page Freelancer Canvas ↗
- Niche Finder worksheet · S1 ↗
- Package Designer · S2 ↗
- Interview cards & Promise builder · F3 ↗

Frameworks & further reading

- Business Model Canvas, strategyzer.com
- Value Proposition Canvas, strategyzer.com
- Blue Ocean "Strategy Canvas" (ERRC)
- Lean Canvas, leanstack.com

Register your business (official)

- Portugal, eportugal.gov.pt (Empresa na Hora)
- Lithuania, registrucentras.lt
- Slovenia, spot.gov.si (e-VEM), free & online
- VAT-exempt up to €15k / €45k / €60k (PT/LT/SI)

Free tools for a one-person business

- Design, canva.com
- Invoicing, wave / zervant / sumup
- Booking, calendly / cal.com
- Organise, trello / notion

Watch & listen (free)

- Business Model Canvas, Strategyzer (YouTube)
- Value Proposition Canvas, Strategyzer
- Hourly Billing Is Nuts, Jonathan Stark
- Start With Why, Simon Sinek (TED)

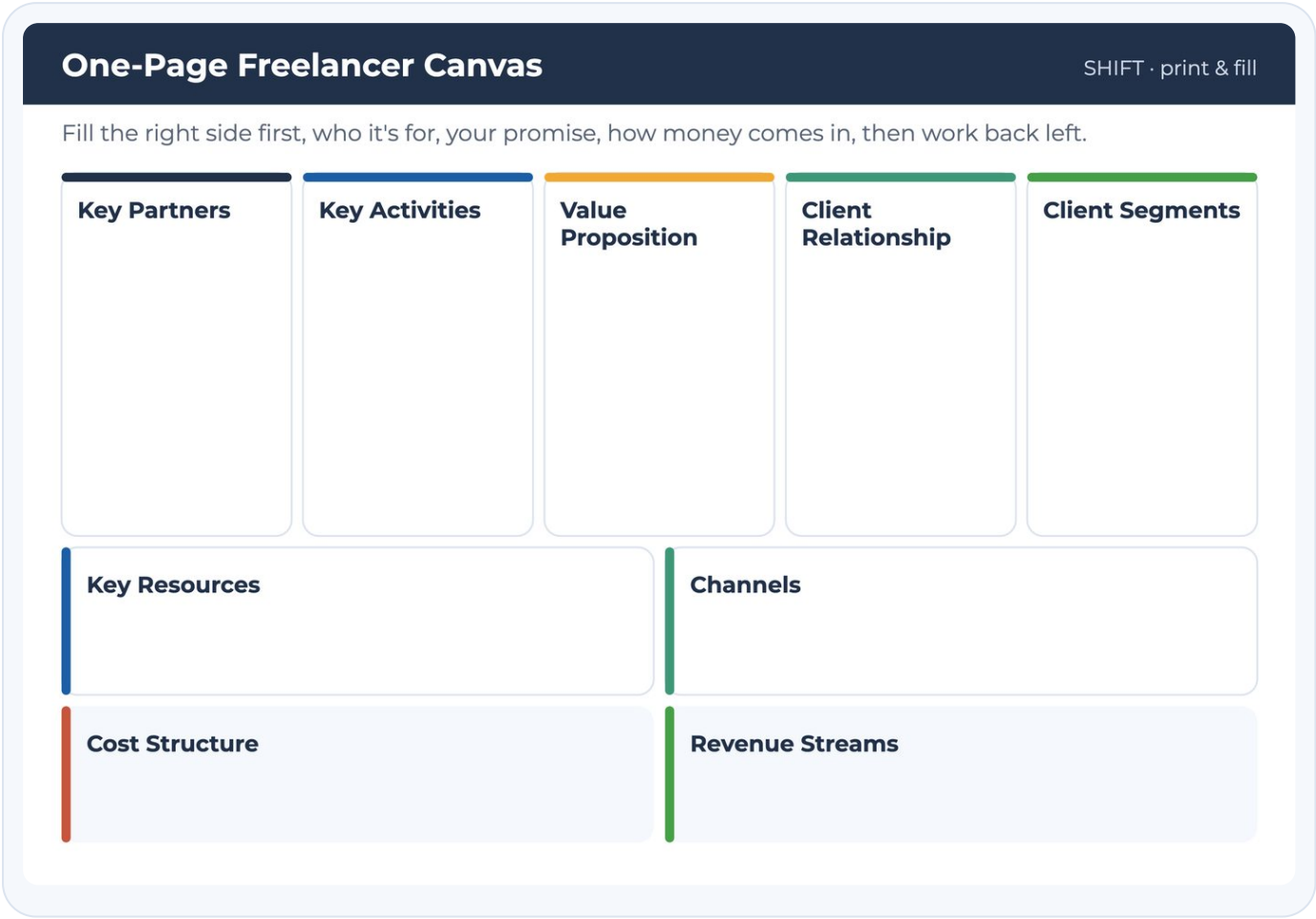
For the facilitator

- Read the full module first, section by section
- Run it in short loops, one framework, then apply
- Every section ends in one written action
- Localised legal & tax facts (PT/LT/SI) →

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 4

One-Page Freelancer Canvas

Print this A4 (or scale to A3) and fill it in for your own work. Used in activity **F2 · One-Page Canvas Jam**.



1. **Start on the right**, who it's for, your promise, and how money comes in.
2. **Then work back left**, what you do, what you have, your allies, your costs.
3. **A blank block is useful**, it shows you exactly where to look next.

Fill the right side first, clients, promise, money. That is where the truth and the money are.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 4

Niche Finder Worksheet

Self-directed activity **S1 · Find Your Niche**. Print and complete on your own, you don't invent a niche, you notice the one already in your best work.

Niche Finder Worksheet (S1)

SHIFT · print & fill

Notice the niche already hiding in your best past work, you don't invent it, you find it.

1 · List your last five paid jobs

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2 · Circle the best one, then answer:

What did I do best?

_____

Who exactly was the client?

_____

What valuable problem did I solve?

_____

MY NICHE

I help _____

who struggle with _____

to achieve _____

1. **Be honest** about what you actually enjoyed, not what you think you 'should' do.
2. **Stuck?** Ask someone who knows your work: "what am I best at?" Their answer is often your niche.
3. **Narrow is good**, narrow is memorable, and memorable gets recommended.

Your strongest offer lives where what you do best, one client, and a valuable problem overlap.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 3 OF 4

Package Designer

Self-directed activity **S2 · Climb One Rung**. Take one hourly or custom service and design the next rung up, a named, fixed-scope, fixed-price package.

Package Designer (S2)

SHIFT · print & fill

Turn one hourly / custom service into a named, fixed-scope, fixed-price package.

1. **Package name**
   give it a clear, memorable name

2. **Exactly what's included**
   list every deliverable, keep scope tight

3. **One clear price**
   € ____, the whole package, not per hour

4. **Revenue model**
   time · project · retainer · productized · digital

5. **One-line pitch**
   "I help ___ get ___ with my ___ package."

1. **Only package what you've delivered** a few times, standardise what already repeats.

2. **Keep the scope tight**, a clear small offer sells far better than a vague big one.

3. **Then offer it** to one real client this week, or list it clearly on your profile.

Selling hours has a hard ceiling. A named, repeatable package is how income grows without more hours.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 4 OF 4

Interview Cards & Promise Builder

The material for facilitator activity **F3 · Niche & Promise Lab**. Print one per pair, interview your partner, then build the one-sentence promise together.

Interview Cards & Promise Builder (F3)

SHIFT · print & fill

Interview your partner about their best-ever paid job — then build a one-sentence promise.

Interview prompts — ask, listen, note

1. **Tell me about your best-ever paid job. What was it?**
2. **Who exactly was the client — and what did they struggle with?**
3. **What result did you get them?**

MY PROMISE

I help ↳ one specific client

who struggle with ↳ a specific problem

to ↳ a specific result

1. **Ask, listen, note**, don't pitch. Let your partner do the talking about their best job.
2. **One client, one problem, one result**, push past vague answers like 'I help businesses grow'.
3. **Test it**, if your partner can repeat your promise back accurately, it works.

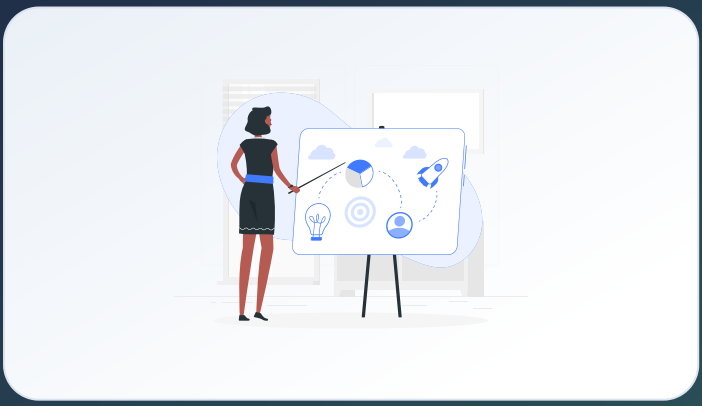
Clients don't buy what you make, they buy the removal of a problem. Name it in one clear sentence.

Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 2 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

Test It for Real

Lean start-up & digital innovation, test a real service cheaply, read the evidence honestly, and use everyday AI to punch above your weight.





Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. · Erasmus+ KA210-YOU · Project 2025-1-SI02-KA210-YOU-000365490

MODULE TWO

Test It for Real

02

Will anyone actually pay for it? Replace guessing with cheap, fast tests, before you sink weeks into the wrong idea.

Module 1 helped you map your business and define an offer. Module 2 asks the harder, more honest question, **will anyone actually pay for it?** The mindset shift is everything: from "build it and hope" to **"run a small experiment and find out."**



By the end, a participant can

- Run the Build–Measure–Learn loop on a real offer, cheaply and fast.
- Design a service MVP and do customer discovery without pitching.
- Tell strong evidence from weak praise, and use everyday AI responsibly.

~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | Localised · PT · LT · SI | Youthpass · Entrepreneurship + digital

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · The Build–Measure–Learn loop
2 · Search before you scale
3 · The smallest version worth testing (MVP)
4 · Customer discovery
5 · Reading the signals (validation)
6 · Testing without a big-city market
7 · Where AI actually helps
8 · Everyday digital & the growth funnel
9 · Work in small, fast cycles
10 · The one-page experiment card

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Discovery Conversations, 75 min
F2 · Strip It to the MVP, 60 min
F3 · AI in Practice, 60 min
S1 · Run a Cheap Test, 45 min
S2 · Your Experiment Card, 30 min
+ Case study · resources · templates

THE ENGINE

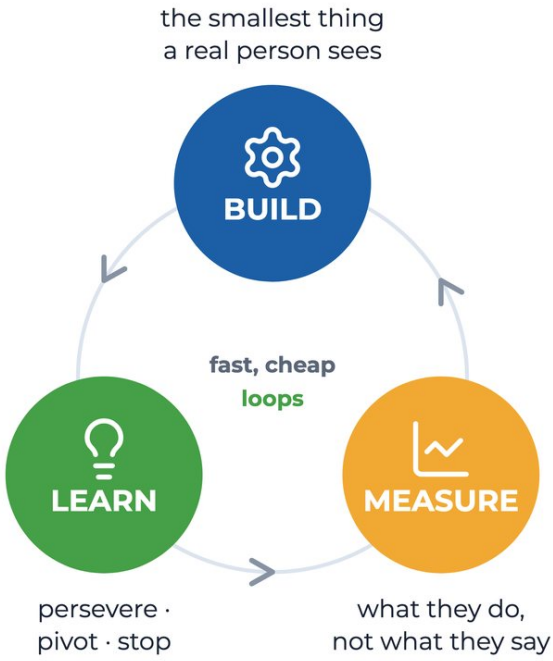
The Build–Measure–Learn loop

Every new idea starts as a guess. The Build–Measure–Learn loop is the engine that turns guesses into evidence, cheaply and fast: build the smallest thing that tests one guess, measure what real people do, and learn enough to decide your next move. Speed around the loop beats size every time.



The Build–Measure–Learn Loop

Turn a guess into evidence as fast and cheaply as you can, then go again.



Speed beats size, a small loop run weekly out-learns a big launch.

Guess → evidence

The loop replaces "I think this will work" with "here's what actually happened." Each lap swaps a little opinion for a little proof.

Fast beats big

A small test this week teaches you more than a perfect plan you launch in six months. Optimise for how quickly you learn, not how much you build.

Turn your best guess into evidence, cheaply and fast, then let the evidence decide your next move.

TWO MODES

Search before you scale

A business has two modes, and mixing them up is expensive. In **search** mode you're still finding out what works, cheaply, with small experiments and pivots. In **execute** mode you've found something that works and you pour fuel on it. Scaling while you're still searching just helps you fail faster.



Search Before You Scale

Finish searching, with pivots, before you execute and build for real.

SEARCH

Discovery
who is the client, and what will they pay for?

Validation
will they actually buy, repeatably?

loop & pivot until it's a clear yes

EXECUTE

- Create demand
- Build the business
- Scale, for real

The expensive mistake: executing too early, while the model is still an unproven guess.

Two different jobs

Searching rewards cheap experiments and quick changes. Executing rewards focus and consistency. Doing one when you need the other wastes everything.

Finish searching first

Only scale once you have real evidence people want it and will pay. Until then, stay in search mode, it's supposed to be messy.

Finish searching, with pivots and dead ends, before you execute. Never pour fuel on a guess.

START SMALL

The smallest version worth testing

The Minimum Viable Product isn't a cheap version of your dream, it's the smallest thing that tests whether people actually want it. Often it's not a product at all: a landing page, a manual service, a single pre-sale. The goal is maximum learning for minimum build.



The Smallest Version Worth Testing

The smallest real offer a client would pay for today — delivered by hand, no systems behind it.

How ideas die quietly

Brand → Website → Pricing tiers → Full service → Launch...

...and nobody paid.

This works

One client → One result → Small price → By hand → Evidence!

...each step earns the next.

Not smaller, sharper

An MVP strips away everything except the one thing that proves demand. If a feature doesn't help you learn, it doesn't belong in the test.

Do it by hand first

Before you automate or build, deliver the result manually to one real client. It's faster, cheaper, and teaches you what to build, if anything.

Don't build the whole studio. Sell one real result, to one real client, by hand, today.

THE HIGHEST-RETURN HABIT

Customer discovery, then iterate

The highest-return habit in this whole module is also the cheapest: talk to the people you want to serve, about their problem, not your idea. A few honest conversations will teach you more about what to build, and how to sell it, than months of guessing at your desk.





Their problem, not your idea

Ask about their world, what they struggle with, what they've tried, what it costs them. The moment you pitch your idea, they turn polite and stop being useful.

Facts, not compliments

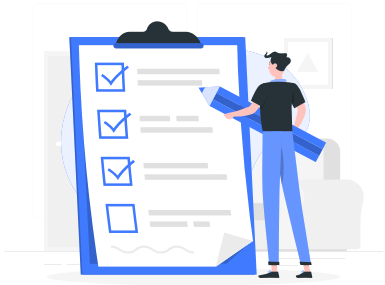
Dig for past behaviour and real money, not opinions about the future. “Would you use this?” is worthless; “what did you do last time?” is gold.

Talk to people about their problem, not your idea. A few honest conversations beat months of guessing.

CLIMB THE PROOF LADDER

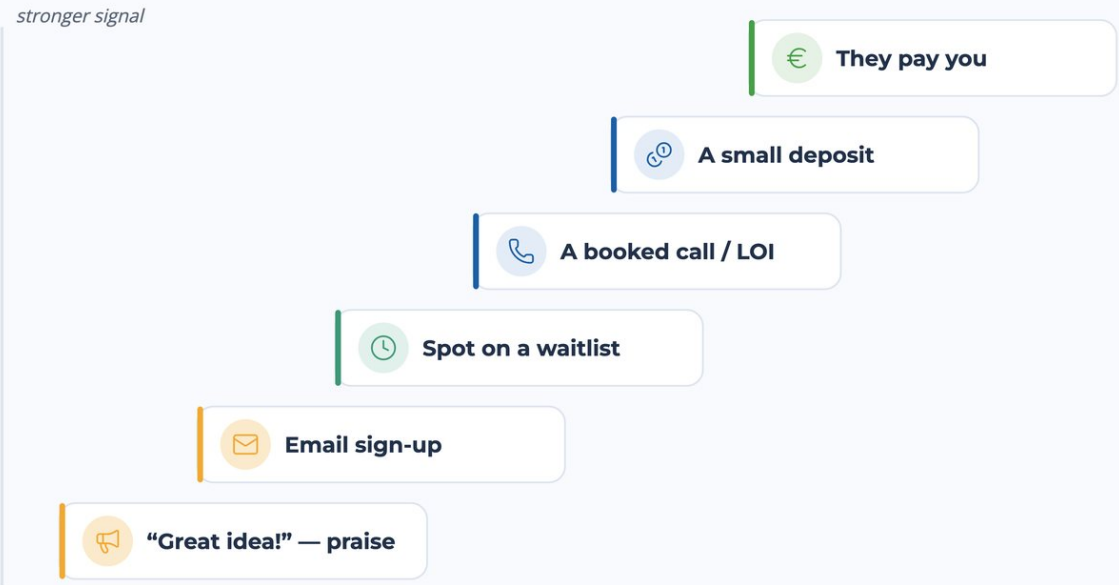
The validation ladder

"Validated" isn't yes-or-no, it's a ladder of ever-stronger proof. A like is the flimsiest rung; an email sign-up is firmer; a pre-payment is strong; a repeat purchase is strongest. The higher you climb before committing real resources, the safer your bet, and how far you climb should match how much you're about to risk.



Reading the Signals

The further down, the more it costs them — so the more it means. Build toward money.



Behaviour beats words

Every rung up the ladder swaps talk for action, and action for money. What people *do*, and especially what they *pay*, is worth far more than what they say.

Climb before you commit

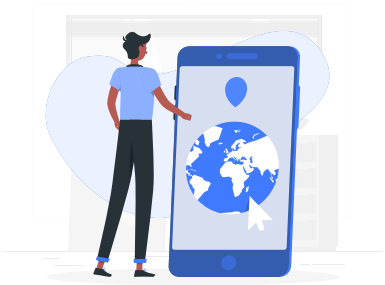
Match your proof to your risk. A tiny bet needs a low rung; quitting your job or spending your savings needs a high one, a pre-sale, not a compliment.

Validation is a ladder, not a yes. Climb from likes to sign-ups to payments, and match how high you climb to how much you're about to risk.

REACH PEOPLE ANYWHERE

Reaching people, city or not

You don't need a city or a big following to reach customers, you need the *right* channels for where you and they actually are. For young freelancers outside the big centres, that often means local networks, community groups, word of mouth and online platforms that erase distance entirely. The best channel is the one your specific customers already use.



Testing Without a Big-City Market

Where to find real signals in a regional or rural area — eight places to start.

- Local FB & WhatsApp
- The weekly market
- Community centres
- Local trade associations
- Online classifieds
- Parish / town newsletter
- Local businesses
- Word of mouth

You don't need a crowd — you need a handful of the right real people.

Go where they already are

Don't build an audience from scratch if your customers already gather somewhere, a local group, a marketplace, a WhatsApp community. Meet them there instead.

Distance is optional now

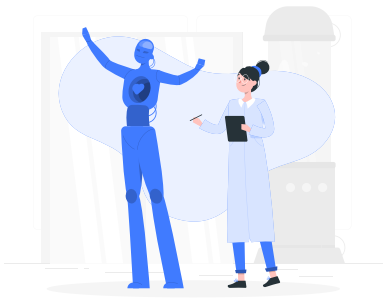
Online channels let a freelancer in a small town serve clients anywhere. Your location limits you far less than which channels you choose to use.

Reach people through the channels they already use, local networks or global platforms, not the ones that merely sound impressive.

YOUR UNFAIR HELPER

Where AI actually helps a freelancer

AI won't run your business, but it can quietly do four jobs for a freelancer: draft (first versions of writing and ideas), summarise (turn long things short), research (gather and organise), and automate (repetitive admin). You keep the judgement, taste and final decision, AI just removes the blank page and the busywork.



Where AI Actually Helps a Freelancer

Delegate the draft, the admin and the research — keep judgement and the final call.

Create
drafts of posts, emails, proposals

Understand
summarise reviews into insight

Automate
reply templates, tidy notes, admin

Learn
new concepts explained simply

⚠ Never send what you haven't read · no private client data
check every fact · keep your own voice

A helper, not a boss

Let AI take the first draft and the admin; you keep taste, judgement and the final call. Never publish or send anything you haven't checked and made your own.

Two firm rules

Never trust its facts without checking, it invents confidently. And never paste a client's private data into a tool you don't control. AI drafts; you're responsible.

Let AI take the first draft and the admin, you keep judgement, taste and the final decision.

FIND THE LEAK

The growth funnel

Getting customers isn't one event, it's a funnel with five leaky stages: people find you (acquisition), try you (activation), come back (retention), tell others (referral), and pay (revenue). Growth isn't "get more leads", it's finding the one stage that leaks most and fixing that.



The Growth Funnel (AARRR)

Where do clients drop off? Track five stages, fix the leakiest one first.



Also called "Pirate Metrics." For a freelancer: don't chase more leads if the leak is retention.

Find the leak, not more leads

Pouring more people into a funnel that leaks at "come back" just wastes them faster. Fix the biggest drop-off before you chase more attention.

Referrals feed the top

A happy customer who tells others quietly refills the top of your funnel for free, which is why retention and referral matter as much as acquisition.

Don't chase more leads, find the leakiest stage of your funnel and fix that one first.

SHIP SMALL, SHIP OFTEN

Work in small cycles

You don't have to get everything right before you start. Working in small cycles, plan a little, do a little, review, adjust, means you're always shipping something real and learning from it, instead of disappearing for months to build a perfect thing that may miss. Small, frequent loops beat one big, late reveal.



Work in Small, Fast Cycles

A tiny goal, a little doing, something real, every single week.



Small loops, real feedback

Each short cycle ends with something you can show and learn from. You course-correct every week instead of discovering at the end that you were off.

Done beats perfect

A rough thing shipped and improved teaches you more than a perfect thing still in your head. Momentum and feedback compound; polish in private doesn't.

Work in small cycles, plan, do, review, adjust, so you're always shipping and learning, never disappearing for months.

TEST, DON'T GUESS

Run it like an experiment

Every uncertain decision can be run as a small experiment instead of a gamble. Write down your assumption, the test, and what result would prove you right or wrong, before you run it. Then let the outcome, not your hopes, decide. An experiment card turns "I think" into "we found out."



The One-Page Experiment Card

Fill it in before you test; let the number, not your hopes, decide what happens next.

EXPERIMENT CARD *one test · one number*

WE BELIEVE
[client] has [problem] and will pay for [our small offer]

WE'LL TEST IT BY
the cheapest real test we can run

WE'RE RIGHT IF
a clear number — e.g. 3 of 5 say yes, or 2 pay a deposit

THEN WE'LL
persevere · pivot · stop

Decide the rule first

Name the pass/fail line *before* you run the test, or you'll rationalise whatever happens into a "yes." The honesty is in setting the bar in advance.

Small, fast, cheap

A good experiment risks little and answers quickly. If a test is expensive or slow, shrink it until you can run it this week without much at stake.

Turn decisions into experiments: write the assumption, the test, and the pass/fail line before you run it, then let the result decide.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Discovery Conversations

75 min

Role-play & planning

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 4 · Customer discovery & iteration.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Run a problem-first interview without pitching, and plan five real discovery conversations to hold this week.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   Explain the goal: understand the problem, don't sell. Money follows understanding.
2. **Demo** · 10 min
   Role-play a pitchy conversation, then a listening one. Ask the group to spot the difference.
3. **Practice in pairs** · 20 min
   A plays a potential client; B interviews using the prompt cards, questions only, no pitching. Then swap.
4. **Debrief** · 10 min
   What was hardest? (Usually: resisting the urge to pitch.)
5. **Plan real conversations** · 20 min
   Each person lists five real people in their niche and how they'll reach them.
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Everyone commits to holding at least one real conversation before the next session.

THE FRAMEWORK

Talk about their problem, not your idea, questions only in round one.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Printed interview prompt cards ("What's the hardest part of...?"); a planning sheet for listing five people.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print prompt cards and planning sheets. Read sub-chapter 4. Be ready to role-play both a bad (pitchy) and a good (listening) conversation yourself.

Facilitator tips

The pitch reflex is universal, enforce "questions only" in round one. For shy learners, give a full written script. For migrant and Roma youth, conversations can happen in their community and first language, their networks are a real discovery channel, not a limitation.

→ What can I do next?

Hold one real discovery conversation this week and write down the exact words the person used about their problem.

Reflection & Youthpass

What did I hear from a real person that I could not have guessed alone? **Youthpass:** Communication + entrepreneurship, "I can learn from a real customer instead of guessing."

★ Expert extension

These conversations are the Discovery stage. Don't jump to selling or scaling until Discovery and Validation are done, and be ready to pivot if the evidence tells you to.

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • Strip It to the MVP

60 min

Hands-on exercise

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 3 · Minimum Viable Product.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Cut a 'dream service' down to the smallest payable version and define one real client they could offer it to this month.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   An MVP is the smallest thing a client pays for today, delivered by hand, no systems yet.
2. **Brain-dump** · 10 min
   Write out your full 'dream service' with everything you imagine it including.
3. **Strike it out** · 15 min
   Cross out everything not needed to deliver one valuable result to one client this month.
4. **Define the MVP** · 15 min
   Write: the one result, the one client, the one (even small) price, delivered by hand.
5. **Pair check** · 10 min
   A partner asks: "could someone pay for just this, today?" Adjust until the answer is yes.
6. **Close** · 5 min
   Each person states their MVP in one sentence.

THE FRAMEWORK

The smallest thing a client pays for today, by hand, no systems.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Paper and pens; the "not this / this" MVP handout for reference.

FACILITATOR PREP

Print the MVP handout. Read sub-chapter 3. Have a relatable example of an over-built idea ready (e.g. someone who spent months on a brand before a single sale).

Facilitator tips

Learners over-build out of perfectionism. Celebrate the shortest list. For creatives, the urge to make it beautiful is strong, remind them: deliver by hand, no brand or website yet. Reassure NEET/first-time learners that 'by hand, small price' is exactly right.

→ What can I do next?

Offer your MVP to one real person this week, not a friend being polite, a genuine potential client.

Reflection & Youthpass

What was I about to build that I didn't actually need? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can find the smallest valuable version of my idea."

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • AI in Practice

60 min

Demo & hands-on

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 7 · AI tools for freelancers.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Use AI for a content draft, a customer-insight summary and a small automation, and apply the responsible-use rules.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   AI is a confident intern: fast and helpful, but you're the boss who checks the work.
2. **Demo 'Create'** · 10 min
   Together, draft a client email or post from a short prompt, then critique and edit it as a group.
3. **Demo 'Understand'** · 10 min
   Paste the sample reviews and have AI summarise them into a simple client persona.
4. **Demo 'Automate'** · 10 min
   Create a reusable reply template or tidy a block of messy notes.
5. **Responsible-use rules** · 10 min
   Never send what you haven't read · no private client data · check facts · keep your own voice.
6. **Hands-on + close** · 15 min
   Each learner tries one task on their own offer, then shares one thing AI saved time on.

THE FRAMEWORK

Create · Understand · Automate · Learn, you always check the work.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

A device or phone per learner with a free AI chat tool; the AI-tools map; a short block of sample customer reviews to summarise.

FACILITATOR PREP

Make sure everyone can access a free AI tool. Prepare and test the prompts yourself beforehand. Have the sample reviews ready to paste.

Facilitator tips

For low digital confidence, pair learners with a more confident peer and go slowly. Stress privacy around client data, make this rule non-negotiable. For non-native speakers, AI can help draft in a second language, but it must be checked, not trusted blindly.

→ What can I do next?

Use AI for one real task this week, a draft, a summary or an automation, and edit it into your own voice before using it.

Reflection & Youthpass

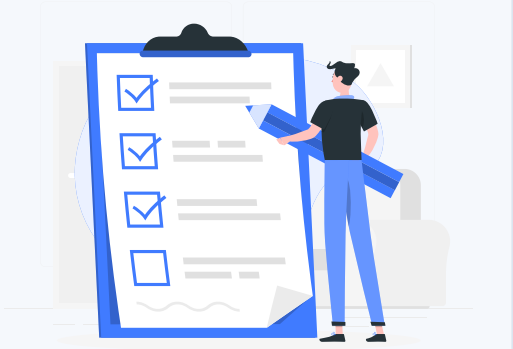
Where did AI genuinely help, and where did my own judgement matter most? **Youthpass:** Digital competence, "I can use AI tools practically and responsibly in my work."

SELF-DIRECTED · ~45 min + run time · Mini-mission

S1 • Run a Cheap Test

Not all 'yes' is equal. Chase the signals that cost the other person something, a deposit, a booking, a payment.

1. **Pick one assumption**
   e.g. "people will pay €X for Y".
2. **Choose the cheapest real test**
   offer it to five people · a small pre-sale · a simple message · a basic landing note.
3. **Decide your signal in advance**
   what exactly counts as a 'yes'? (money > committed time > email > praise)
4. **Run it and record**
   write down what people actually did, not what they politely said.



→ Next

Based on the signal, decide: persevere, pivot or stop. Then plan your next small loop.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Did I get real commitment, or just praise? Is my success number honest, or did I set it low to protect my idea?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Planning exercise

S2 • Your Experiment Card

Before you test, write it down. Afterwards, the card, not your hopes, tells you what to do next.

1. **We believe...**
   [client] has [problem] and will pay for [our small offer].
2. **We'll test it by...**
   the cheapest real test you can run.
3. **We're right if...**
   a clear number: e.g. 3 of 5 say yes, or 2 pay a deposit in a week.
4. **Then we'll...**
   persevere · pivot · stop, and add a date to run it by.



→ Next

Print the experiment card, run the test by your date, then fill in what happened and make the call.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Did I get real commitment, or just praise? Is my success number honest, or did I set it low to protect my idea? **Youthpass:** "I can test an idea cheaply, read the evidence honestly, and decide what to do next."

CASE STUDY

Buffer: two pages before a product

Joel Gascoigne had an idea for a tool to schedule social-media posts. The obvious move was to spend months building it. Instead, in 2010, he did something far cheaper, he **tested whether anyone actually wanted it, before writing the real product**.

He built a tiny two-page website. The first page explained the idea and had a **"Plans & Pricing"** button. Anyone who clicked it, signalling they might *pay*, landed on a second page that said, honestly, "not quite ready yet," with a box to leave their email. That click was his signal: not praise, but a real step toward money.

Enough people clicked through and left their emails that Joel knew the demand was real. Only **then** did he build a minimum version and go back to those exact people. He had his first paying customers within weeks, and Buffer grew into a company used by millions, still without ever building on a guess.

Joel Gascoigne / Buffer. Sources: buffer.com · failory.com. Facilitator tip: pair it with a **local** freelancer's cheap test from your own community.



THE MODULE 2 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Test before you build (MVP) →**
- **Reading the signal, a click toward paying →**
- **Build–Measure–Learn →**
- **The experiment card →**

What you can borrow, at any size

1. **Fake the offer first.** A one-page site or a simple message can test demand before you build anything.
2. **Make the signal cost something.** A pricing click, a deposit or an email beats a polite "great idea".
3. **Only build after the yes.** Go back to the exact people who signalled, they are your first customers.

He didn't build first and hope. He tested demand with two pages, then built only what people had already reached for.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 2. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages) and also at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- Experiment Card · S2 ↗
- Discovery Interview Guide · F1 ↗
- "Not this / this" MVP handout · F2 ↗
- AI-tools map · F3 ↗

Frameworks & further reading

- The Lean Startup, Eric Ries
- Customer Development, Steve Blank
- "Idea to paying customers in 7 weeks", Buffer
- The Mom Test, Rob Fitzpatrick (discovery)

Everyday digital tools (free tiers)

- Book, calendly / cal.com
- Get paid, sumup / wise / revolut
- Simple site, carrd.co / a Google form
- Talk to customers, WhatsApp Business

Free AI tools by job

- Create drafts, a free AI chat tool
- Understand, summarise reviews & feedback
- Automate, templates, tidy notes
- ⚠ Never paste private client data

Watch & listen (free)

- The Lean Startup, Eric Ries (talk)
- Steve Blank, Customer Development
- Buffer, the validation story

Case study

The "test before you build" story on the previous page, Buffer by Joel Gascoigne, pairs well with a local freelancer who ran a cheap test in your own community.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 4

Experiment Card

The tool for self-directed activity **S2 · Your Experiment Card**. Print several, you'll run many tests, not one.

Experiment Card

SHIFT · print & fill

Fill it in BEFORE you test. Print several, you'll run many experiments.

1 · We believe that...
which client · which problem · what they'll pay for

2 · We'll test it by...
the cheapest real test you can run

3 · We're right if...
a clear number decided in advance (e.g. 3 of 5 say yes)

4 · Then we'll... persevere · pivot · stop
circle one, based on the number

Run the test by: ___ / ___ / ___ Result: _____

1. **Decide the number first**, the pass/fail bar, before you test. It stops wishful thinking.
2. **Keep it small, cheap and real**, the fastest honest signal, not a perfect launch.
3. **Chase money over praise**, money > committed time > email > a polite "great idea".

Before you test, write it down. After you test, the card, not your hopes, decides what happens next.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 4

Discovery Interview Guide

The material for facilitator activity **F1 · Discovery Conversations**. Ask about their problem, questions only, no pitch.

Discovery Interview Guide

SHIFT · print & fill

Ask about their problem, not your idea. Questions only in round one; make no offer.

Prompt questions (ask, then be quiet and listen)

1. **"What's the hardest part of ...?"**
2. **"Tell me about the last time you dealt with this."**
3. **"What have you tried so far? How did it go?"**
4. **"How much time / money does this cost you?"**

Five real people I'll talk to this week, and how I'll reach them

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

1. **Ask, then be quiet.** The client's real words about their problem are the gold.
2. **No offer in round one.** Resist the pitch reflex, you're collecting evidence, not selling.
3. **Five real people** beat a hundred guesses. Plan who, and how you'll reach them.

Talk to people about their problem, not your idea, and write down the exact words they use.

PRINTABLE HANDOUT · 3 OF 4

The MVP Handout, “not this / this”

A keep-able reference for **F2 · Strip It to the MVP**. Print it and pin it up while you cut your dream service down.



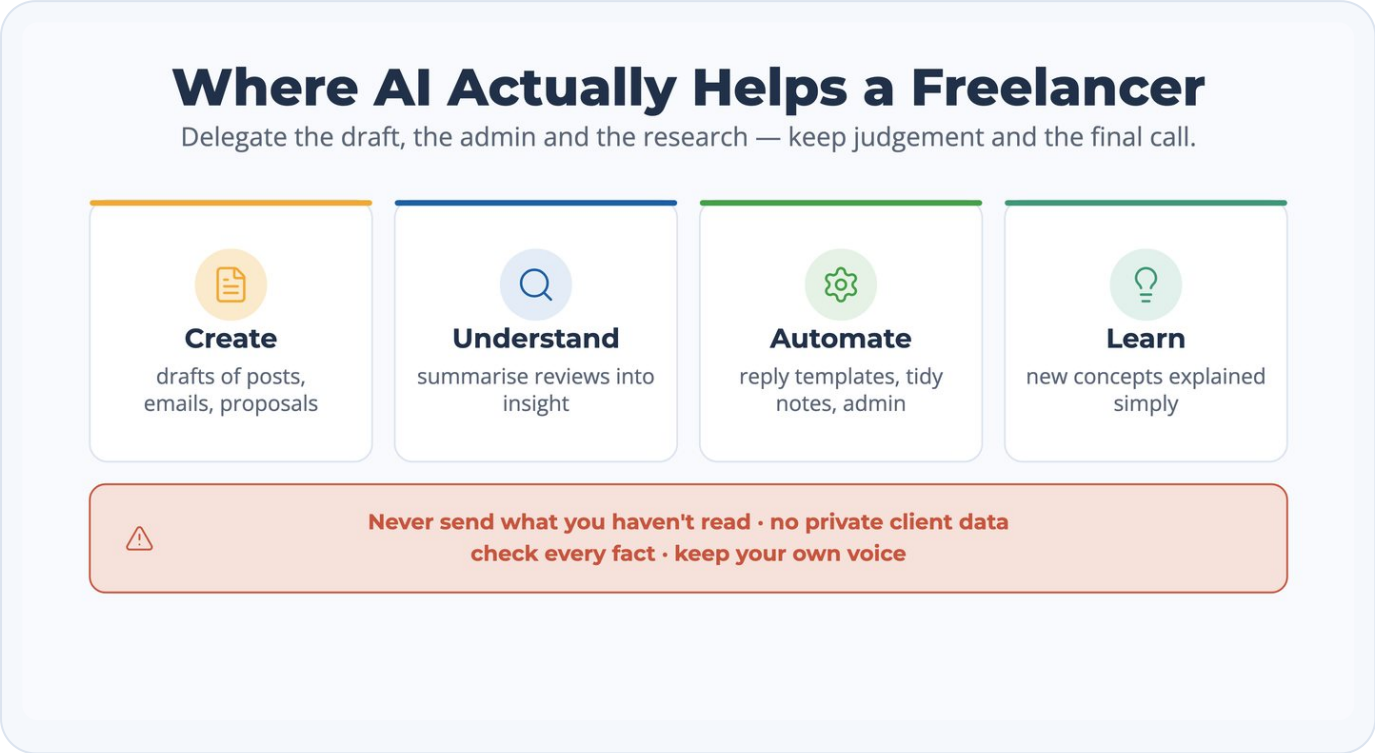
1. **Shortest list wins.** You're finding the single most valuable slice, not a smaller dream.
2. **Delivered by hand.** No brand, no website, no systems, those are earned later.
3. **One real, even small, price.** If someone would pay for just this, today, it's an MVP.

Don't build the whole studio. Sell one real result, to one real client, by hand, today.

PRINTABLE HANDOUT · 4 OF 4

The AI-Tools Map

A keep-able reference for **F3 · AI in Practice**. Four jobs to delegate to AI, with the rules that keep you in charge.



1. **AI drafts, you decide.** Read and edit everything before it leaves your hands.
2. **No private client data** in tools you don't control, this rule is non-negotiable.
3. **Keep your own voice.** Use AI to start, then make it sound like you.

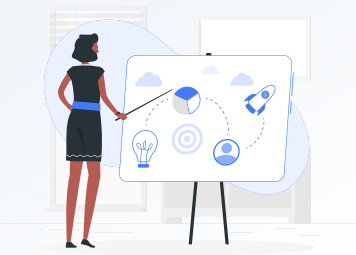
AI is a confident intern, fast and helpful, but you are the boss who checks the work.

Co-funded by
the European Union

MODULE 3 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

Money That Lasts

Financial literacy & financing, read your own money honestly, price with confidence, keep a reserve, and make the big decisions with a rule, not fear.



Steady, not hand-to-mouth

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them. · Erasmus+ KA210-YOU · Project 2025-1-SI02-KA210-YOU-000365490

MODULE THREE

Money That Lasts

03

The topic freelancers worry about most and plan for least. Turn that anxiety into a small set of tools you can actually use.

Most freelancers don't get into trouble because they earn too little for a month. They get into trouble because they **can't see what's coming**, price their work without confidence, or keep nothing back for the lean weeks. The guiding principle is simple: **raise and spend the least you need, price fairly, and keep a reserve**, money that lasts is built mostly by controlling what goes out.



By the end, a participant can

- Tell cash apart from profit, and know their gross margin.
- Build a 12-month cash-flow forecast and see the lean months before they arrive.
- Price from a floor rate, keep a reserve, and decide with a rule, not fear.

~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | Localised · PT · LT · SI | Youthpass · Financial literacy

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · Cash is not profit
2 · The few numbers worth knowing
3 · The 12-month cash-flow forecast
4 · A reserve that protects you
5 · Price with confidence
6 · Five money decision rules
7 · Going legit: plan the transition
8 · The funding map
9 · Hiring an accountant

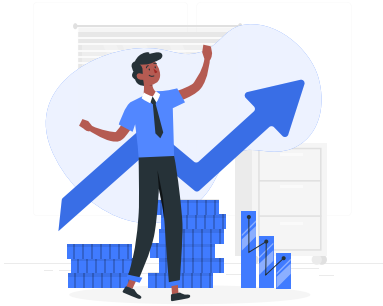
ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Cash-Flow Map, 60 min
F2 · Price With Confidence, 60 min
F3 · Going-Legit Clinic, 60 min
S1 · Know Your Numbers, 30 min
S2 · My Money Plan, 50 min
+ Case study · resources · templates · glossary

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Cash is not profit

The day a big invoice lands, you feel rich, that's cash. What's actually yours after costs, tax and the quiet months is profit, and it's usually much smaller. Freelancers who confuse the two spend money that was never theirs. Steer by profit; watch cash so you never run dry.



Cash is not Profit

Two numbers freelancers confuse — telling them apart keeps you out of trouble.

Cash

What's in the account right now.

Feels like wealth the day a big invoice lands.

VS

Profit

What you keep after every real cost & tax.

The number that actually pays you, months later.

Month 1	→	Month 2	→	Month 3
€3,000 invoice lands		**spend like it's yours**		**tax bill due**
feel rich		*cash drops*		*profit was €1,800*

A big invoice is not income you can spend — part of it is tax and costs you haven't paid yet.

Cash ≠ profit

Cash is money moving through your account; profit is what you keep after everything. A full account today can still be an unprofitable month.

Set tax aside on arrival

The moment money lands, move the tax portion out of reach. It was never yours, treating it as income is how freelancers get a nasty year-end surprise.

Feeling rich the day an invoice lands is cash. What you keep after costs and tax is profit, steer by that.

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The few numbers worth knowing

You don't need to be an accountant, you need a handful of numbers you actually watch: what each client costs you to win, what they're worth, your monthly running costs, and your break-even point. A few honest figures, checked regularly, beat a perfect spreadsheet you never open.



The Few Numbers Worth Knowing

Not management accounts — a handful of numbers, checked once a month.

Number	In plain words	How to work it out
Gross margin	What you keep from a job after its direct costs	(price − direct cost) ÷ price
Operating margin	What's left after your running costs too	(revenue − costs) ÷ revenue
Cost to win a client	What selling & marketing cost per new client	spend ÷ new clients (CAC)
Value of a client	Profit one client brings while they stay	monthly rev × margin × months (CLV)

Rule of thumb: a client should be worth at least 3× what it costs to win, and earn that back within a year.

A client worth 3×

Aim to earn at least three times what it cost to win a client, and to earn it back within a year. If winning costs more than the client returns, the growth is losing you money.

Know your break-even

The revenue you need each month just to cover costs and pay yourself a basic wage. Below it you're shrinking; above it you're building. Know the line.

A client should be worth at least 3× what it costs to win, and earn that back within a year.

SEE THE YEAR COMING

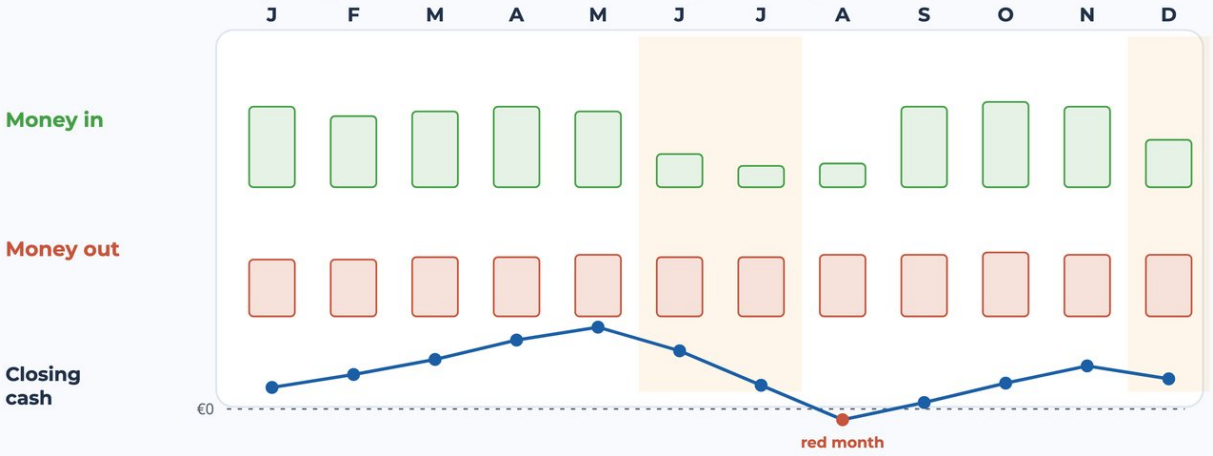
The 12-month cash-flow forecast

Freelance income arrives in waves, feast then famine, so a single month tells you almost nothing. A simple 12-month cash-flow forecast lays the whole year out: money expected in, money going out, and the running balance, so you can see the lean months coming while you still have time to act on them.



The 12-Month Cash-Flow Forecast

Lay the year out so the lean stretch is a planned dip, not a shock.



Shade the slow months now, fund them from the strong ones, and circle the first month your cash dips below €0.

See the dip before it bites

A forecast turns a nasty surprise into a known event. Spotting a thin March in January means you can line up work now, not panic then.

Plan in pencil, review in ink

A forecast is a living guess, not a promise. Its value comes from checking it against reality every month and adjusting, a budget you never review is just a wish.

Plan in pencil, review in ink. A budget you never check is a wish; one you review monthly is a steering wheel.

BUILD A BUFFER

A reserve that protects you

Freelancers get no sick pay and no paid holiday, so the only safety net is the one you build. A cash reserve turns a bad month from a crisis into an inconvenience. Aim to save, in good months, a buffer of living costs: one month is survival, three is safe, six is strong. Keep it separate, out of sight and out of spend.



A Reserve That Protects You

Saved in the good months for the lean ones, the gap between a bad month and a crisis.



STRONG ------> 6× fixed costs, sleep easy

SAFE RECOMMENDED ---> 3× fixed costs, aim for this

SURVIVAL ------> 1× fixed costs, the bare floor

Keep it in a separate account, out of sight, out of spend. It's what lets you say no to an underpriced panic gig.

One, three, six

One month of costs is bare survival; three months is genuine safety; six months is strength and the freedom to say no. Build up the ladder as your income allows.

Out of sight, out of spend

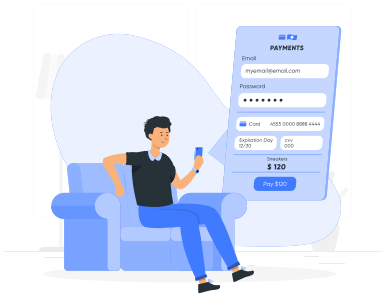
A reserve only works if you can't casually dip into it. Keep it in a separate account you don't see daily, so it's there for a real emergency, not a quiet Tuesday.

A reserve turns a bad month into a manageable one. Keep it separate, out of sight, out of spend.

CHARGE WHAT IT'S WORTH

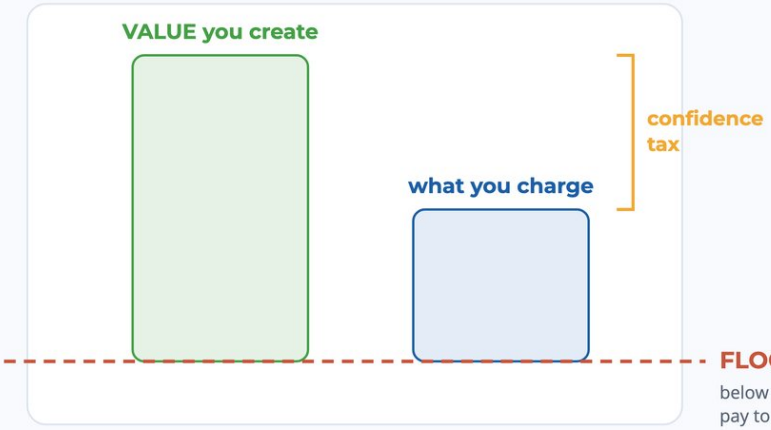
Price with confidence

Under-pricing is the most common, and most damaging, freelancer habit. It comes from fear, not maths. The fix is two numbers: your **floor** (the rate below which the work costs you money) which you never break, and your **value** (what the result is worth to the client) which you price toward. Then say the number, out loud, without apology.



Price With Confidence

Never go under your floor, and close the 'confidence tax' gap to the value you create.



Floor = (yearly costs + your wage + tax set-aside + reserve slice) ÷ realistic billable days.
Quote from the floor up, then say the number without apology.

Know your floor

Your floor is the rate that covers costs, tax, unpaid time and a real wage. Quote below it and you're paying to work. Never, ever go under it.

Price the value, not the hours

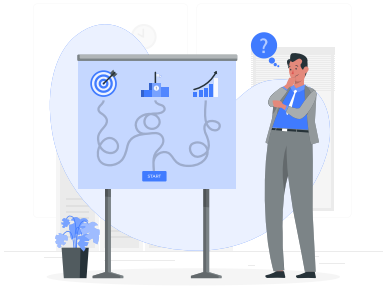
Clients pay for the outcome, not your time. A logo that wins a client is worth far more than the hours it took, price toward the result, and drop the apology.

Know your floor and never quote under it. Then price toward value, and say the number without apology.

DECIDE WITH A RULE

Five money decision rules

Money decisions are hard because they arrive when you're stressed, a tempting client, a big purchase, a cash gap. The fix is to decide the rule in a calm moment, then just follow it in the hard one. A few simple rules, spend only what you can lose, sleep on big buys, keep the tax untouched, remove the agonising when it matters most.



Five Money Decision Rules

Decide fast on the facts, slowly on anything hard to undo.

1	**Scale now or wait?**	Wait until the same work repeats predictably; test cheaply before you spend on growth.
2	**Hire or stay solo?**	Only when the work is repeatable AND you've saved ~3 months of that person's cost, on top of your buffer.
3	**Invest or keep cash?**	Spend against a tested plan; don't let a cash spike inflate your fixed costs.
4	**Cheap gig or hold price?**	Hold your floor. A job below the floor costs money to do.
5	**Income unstable, now what?**	Cut fixed costs, grow the reserve first, and chase recurring income over one-off spikes.

Set the rule when calm

Decisions made under pressure are usually bad. Agree your rules on a quiet afternoon, then a stressful moment becomes “follow the rule”, not “agonise again”.

Fast on facts, slow on the irreversible

Reversible, cheap decisions: decide fast and move on. Big, hard-to-undo ones: slow down, sleep on them, check them against your rules and your reserve.

Fast on the facts, slow on the irreversible. Set the rule in a calm moment; follow it in a hard one.

GO LEGIT, PLAN IT

Plan the transition, don't fear it

Formalising, registering, paying into the system, can feel like all cost and no gain, especially if you'd lose a benefit or allowance. But staying informal has real costs too: no rights, no protection, no access to bigger clients or funding. The move isn't to fear it or rush it, but to plan the transition so the rights you gain outweigh what you give up.



Going Legit: Plan the Transition

Registering changes two things at once — go in with eyes open, not fear.

Before registering	After registering
− Informal income	✓ Pay tax & contributions
− Some welfare support	✓ Welfare may reduce
− No tax / contributions yet	✓ Gain rights & protection
− No formal rights or protection	✓ Can grow, invoice, access funding

⚠ **Never guess the rules.**

Figures change yearly and differ per country — always confirm with the official national portal.
For migrant & Roma learners, point to free, trusted local advice and address fear of authorities directly.

Rights, not just obligations

Formalising isn't only tax and admin, it brings real rights: pension, sick and parental protection, credit, contracts you can enforce, and clients who can only work with the registered.

Mind the benefits cliff

If registering means losing a benefit, don't just leap. Check the actual thresholds, time the move, and make sure your new income clears the gap, plan the transition rather than fearing it.

Formalising trades some support for real rights and room to grow. Plan the transition, don't fear it.

MATCH MONEY TO STAGE

The funding map

When you need money to grow, the instinct is to think "investor" or "loan", but those are usually the wrong, and most expensive, first stops. There's a ladder: reinvest your own revenue, then grants and youth schemes, then small microloans, and only much later, equity. Match the money to your stage, and always start with the cheapest.



The Funding Map

Match the money to your stage — cheapest, least-risky first.

1. **Your own money** — Bootstrapping, reinvest revenue, keep costs low
2. **Grants & youth schemes** — Non-repayable EU / national youth & start-up funds
3. **Microloan** — Small, repayable — when a tested plan needs a push
4. **Investment** — Give up a share — only for proven, scalable models

Start at the left. Look up Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs, the Youth Guarantee and local microfinance before giving up any share of your business.

Cheapest first

Reinvested profit costs nothing and keeps you in control. Grants are non-repayable. Loans cost interest. Equity costs ownership, forever. Climb the ladder from the bottom.

Grants before giving away

Especially for young entrepreneurs, look hard for grants, youth schemes and non-repayable support before you borrow, and long before you give away a share of your business.

Match the money to your stage, cheapest first. Reinvest, then grants, then microloans, equity last.

GET HELP AT THE RIGHT TIME

Hiring an accountant

You don't need an accountant on day one, but the moment tax, VAT or contributions get real, a good one pays for themselves in time, stress and avoided mistakes. Know what to ask for, and treat it as buying **peace of mind and hours back**, not a grudge cost.

When it is worth it

- You cross the VAT threshold
- Tax feels confusing or scary
- You spend hours on admin you hate
- You are about to register or hire

What to ask them

- Fixed monthly fee, not surprises
- Experience with sole traders
- Will they explain, not just file?
- Can they set up simple systems?

Do this yourself first

- Keep clean records as you go
- Separate business & personal money
- Set tax aside every time you are paid
- Bring tidy numbers, it costs less

A good accountant is a guide, not a gatekeeper

Ask them to explain each obligation in plain words the first time. If they can't, find one who will, you stay responsible for your own numbers.

Cheaper if you come organised

The tidier your records, the smaller the bill. Clean books all year turn tax season from a panic into a formality.

Bring an accountant in when tax gets real, and come organised. You are buying back time and peace of mind.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Cash-Flow Map

60 min

Exercise & guided planning

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 3 · The 12-month cash-flow forecast & budgeting.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Build a simple month-by-month forecast and identify the first month their cash would run short.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min

   Open with a question, not a definition: "what month do you dread, money-wise?" Write the months named on the board, a pattern always appears.

2. **Build the shared example** · 15 min

   Invent one fictional freelancer and fill in their year together, rough money in/out, then closing cash. Watch one slow month eat the earlier buffer.

3. **Spot the red month** · 10 min

   Find the first month closing cash goes negative. Test the three levers live: save earlier, push spending later, or raise prices.

4. **Your own forecast** · 20 min

   Each learner drafts their own twelve months with real numbers, three or four rows is plenty. Circulate; rough beats blank.

5. **Circle & commit** · 10 min

   Each person circles their first red month and writes the one move that protects it. Volunteers share, never required.

THE FRAMEWORK

Your money has a calendar, a forecast turns the lean stretch into a planned dip.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

One large printed 12-month grid (A1) or a whiteboard; sticky notes; learners' rough income/cost figures (ask them to bring these); calculators or phones.

FACILITATOR PREP

Draw the grid (months across; rows for opening cash, money in, money out, net, closing cash). Prepare one worked example and shade the slow months for your sector.

Facilitator tips

For low-confidence learners or NEETs, start from the shared example and let them copy the structure. Keep numbers small and real. Never make anyone show their figures.

→ What can I do next?

Finish your 12-month forecast at home and set a reminder in the month before your first red month to act.

Reflection & Youthpass

Where is my next lean month, and what is my one move to get through it? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, planning & financial literacy; learning-to-learn.

★ Expert extension

Add a 'paid 30/60 days late' column for one big client and watch how a slow payer alone can create a red month, then plan for it with deposits or staged invoicing.

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • Price With Confidence

60 min

Role-play & calculation

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 5 · Pricing, the floor rate & value-based thinking.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Work out a floor day-rate and hold a fair price out loud without apologising.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min

   Name the confidence tax: underpricing out of fear is a tax you pay yourself on every invoice. Today we fix the number and the nerve.

2. **Work out your floor** · 15 min

   Each learner fills the floor worksheet: yearly costs + wage + tax set-aside + reserve slice ÷ realistic billable days. Quote under it and you pay to work.

3. **The value flip** · 10 min

   Rewrite one offer from hours to result: "I charge for the result, not the hours." List what the outcome is worth to the client.

4. **Quoting role-play** · 20 min

   In pairs: one states a price and holds it through the silence. Then add 15–20% and say it again. Swap. Confidence is a muscle, rehearse it.

5. **Commit** · 10 min

   Each person writes their floor and the next price they'll quote, and reads the number out loud once, without apology.

THE FRAMEWORK

Never quote under your floor; price toward value, not hours.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed Floor Day-Rate worksheet; calculators or phones; scrap paper for the role-play quotes.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 5. Work the floor calculation yourself first so you can help. Prepare one relatable "underpriced job" story.

Facilitator tips

Underpricing is usually about self-worth, not maths. Celebrate the higher number. For anxious learners, script the exact sentence and let them read it until it feels normal.

→ What can I do next?

Quote your next real job at or above your floor, and say the number without softening it.

Reflection & Youthpass

What is my floor, and where have I been paying the confidence tax? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, financial literacy; personal initiative & confidence.

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Going-Legit Clinic

60 min

Guided clinic & planning

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 7 · Going legit, the benefits trap & tax in plain language.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Map what changes when they register, using their own national source, and plan the transition.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   Registering changes two things at once, new tax/contributions, and possible changes to welfare. That's not a reason to avoid it; it's a reason to plan.
2. **The questions, not the numbers** · 10 min
   Hand out the checklist: what tax/contributions will I owe? the VAT threshold? a reduced-rate or start-up period? what welfare changes?
3. **Look it up together** · 20 min
   In pairs or small groups, learners find the answers on the official portal for their own situation. Facilitator circulates; nobody guesses.
4. **Before / after** · 15 min
   Each learner sketches their own before/after of income and entitlements, and names the gains, rights, invoicing, funding access.
5. **Plan the step** · 10 min
   Each writes the one next action (book advice, gather documents, set a date) and who they'll ask for free help.

THE FRAMEWORK

Registering trades some support for real rights, plan it, don't fear it.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Internet access to the official national portal(s); the registration question checklist; contact details for a free local advice service.

FACILITATOR PREP

Look up your country's official portal and current thresholds beforehand. Line up a trusted local advice contact. Never present invented figures.

Facilitator tips

For migrant and Roma learners especially, address fear of authorities directly and frame registering as gaining protection. Always confirm with the official source and a trusted advisor.

→ What can I do next?

Answer the four registration questions for your own situation using the official portal, and book one free advice session.

Reflection & Youthpass

What do I actually gain by registering, and what is my first concrete step? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + civic competence, knowing your rights and obligations.

★ Expert extension

Compare the cost of staying informal (no rights, no invoices, capped growth) against formalising, the long-run cost of invisibility is usually higher than the tax.

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Mini-mission

S1 • Know Your Numbers

See clearly before you plan. A few real numbers beat a vague feeling every time.

1. **Take your last job**
   write down the price and the direct costs of doing it.
2. **Work out gross margin**
   (price − direct cost) ÷ price. Is it thin, or healthy?
3. **Trace your last 3 clients**
   where did each come from? That's the start of your cost to win one.
4. **Name one number to improve**
   margin, or where clients come from, pick one to work on.



→ Next

If a job's margin is thin, decide: raise the price, cut the cost, or stop taking that kind of work.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

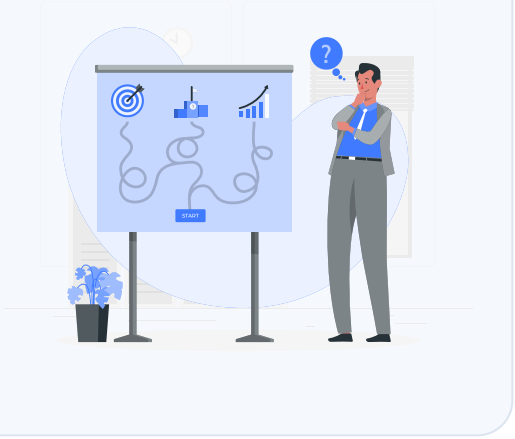
Do I know my floor, my margin and my next red month? Which one will I act on first?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~50 min · Planning exercise

S2 • My Money Plan

Turn the tools into one page you'll actually use, a floor, a reserve target, and a rule.

1. **Set your floor**
   use the Floor worksheet, the rate you never go under.
2. **Pick a reserve target**
   1, 3 or 6 months of fixed costs, and where you'll keep it.
3. **Draft your forecast**
   use the Cash-Flow template and mark the red month.
4. **Write one "if … then …" rule**
   for the next money decision you face, with a date.



→ Next

Pin the one-page plan where you'll see it. Review it monthly, forecast against what actually happened.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Do I know my floor, my margin and my next red month? Which one will I act on first? **Youthpass:** "I can read my own money honestly, price with confidence, and plan for the lean months."

CASE STUDY

Pieter Levels: profit before funding

Pieter Levels is a Dutch maker who, in 2014, set himself a public challenge: build twelve small internet businesses in twelve months. Most failed. But two, a directory for remote workers and a remote-jobs board, started earning real money, and he kept them **deliberately tiny and profitable**.

What makes him a money case study is what he *didn't* do: he never took investment. He **reinvested his own revenue**, kept costs almost nothing (he ran everything himself), and priced for recurring income rather than one-off spikes. He has been unusually public about the numbers, sharing live revenue dashboards, precisely to show young makers that a one-person business can earn a serious, lasting living without giving away a share of it.

Years later those same small products reportedly earn **millions a year** with essentially a team of one. The lesson isn't "go viral." It's that controlling costs, pricing for repeat income, and reinvesting profit is a slower but far more durable path than chasing funding.

Pieter Levels (levels.io). Publicly shares revenue; author of *MAKE*. Facilitator tip: pair it with a **local** freelancer who grew by reinvesting, not borrowing.



THE MODULE 3 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Bootstrapping over equity (funding map) →**
- **Recurring income beats one-off spikes →**
- **Control what goes out →**
- **Price for value & repeat →**

What you can borrow, at any size

1. **Keep costs near zero early.** The less that goes out, the sooner you're profitable and the freer you are.
2. **Price for repeat income.** A subscription or retainer beats a one-off, because it turns a spike into a floor.
3. **Reinvest your own profit.** Fund the next step from revenue before you ever give away a share.

He didn't raise money, he kept costs tiny, priced for repeat income, and reinvested profit. That's money that lasts.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 3. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages) and also at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- Cash-Flow Forecast · F1
- Floor Day-Rate worksheet · F2
- Money glossary · plain-language terms

Reading & further learning

- Profit First, Mike Michalowicz
- Company of One, Paul Jarvis
- The Nomad List revenue dashboards, levels.io
- Your national tax authority's start-up guide

Free money tools

- Invoicing, SumUp / Wave / a simple template
- Set-aside, a separate tax & reserve account
- Bookkeeping, a shared spreadsheet is enough to start
- Payments, Wise / Revolut for cross-border

Funding & advice routes

- Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs
- The Youth Guarantee (your country)
- Local microfinance / credit unions
- Free business-advice services & chambers

Watch & listen (free)

- Pieter Levels, bootstrapping talks
- Profit First, explained
- Your Europe, business & tax basics

Case study

The "profit before funding" story on the previous page, Pieter Levels, pairs well with a local freelancer who grew by reinvesting, not borrowing.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 2

Cash-Flow Forecast

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F1 · Cash-Flow Map**. Fill in rough numbers, foresight, not precision.

Cash-Flow Forecast

SHIFT · print & fill

One row per line, fill in your own rough numbers, month by month.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Opening cash												
Money in												
Money out												
Net (in − out)												
Closing cash												

▶ **Circle the first month your closing cash turns negative, then plan the one move that protects it.**

1. **Three or four rows is plenty**, money in, money out, closing cash. Rough beats blank.
2. **Shade the slow months** and fund them from the strong ones.
3. **Circle the first red month**, that's the one to plan a move for.

Lay the year out so the lean stretch is a planned dip. Circle the red month, then plan the one move that protects it.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 2

Your Floor Day-Rate

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F2 · Price With Confidence**. The rate below which a job costs you money.

Your Floor Day-Rate

SHIFT · print & fill

The rate below which a job costs you money. Fill each line, then add up.

Yearly running costs (software, insurance, etc.)	€
The yearly wage you actually want	€
Tax & contributions set-aside (est.)	€
A slice for your reserve	€
= Total you must cover this year	€
÷ Your realistic billable days (not 365!)	days
= YOUR FLOOR DAY-RATE	€ / day

▶ **Quote from your floor up, never under it. Then practise saying the number without apology.**

1. **Count every real cost**, software, insurance, the wage you actually want, tax and a slice for the reserve.
2. **Use realistic billable days**, not 365, most freelancers bill far fewer days than they think.
3. **Quote from the floor up**, and practise saying the number without apology.

Know the rate below which a job costs you money, and never quote under it.

PLAIN-LANGUAGE TERMS

Money glossary

Every term explained in one line, no accounting background assumed.

Cash
The money actually in your account right now.

Profit
What's left after every real cost and tax are counted.

Gross margin
What you keep from a job after its direct costs: (price − direct cost) ÷ price.

Operating margin
What's left after your running costs (overheads) too.

Overheads
Costs you pay whether or not you have work, software, insurance, rent.

Cash-flow forecast
A month-by-month map of money in and out, so you see the lean months early.

Reserve (buffer)
Savings kept aside to turn a bad month into a manageable one.

Floor rate
The price below which a job actually costs you money.

Value-based pricing
Pricing to the result the client gets, not the hours you spent.

CAC, cost to win a client
What selling and marketing cost you per new client.

CLV, value of a client
The profit one client brings while they stay with you.

Bootstrapping
Funding growth from your own revenue instead of outside money.

Microloan
A small, repayable loan suited to an early, tested plan.

VAT threshold
The sales level above which you must register for and charge VAT.

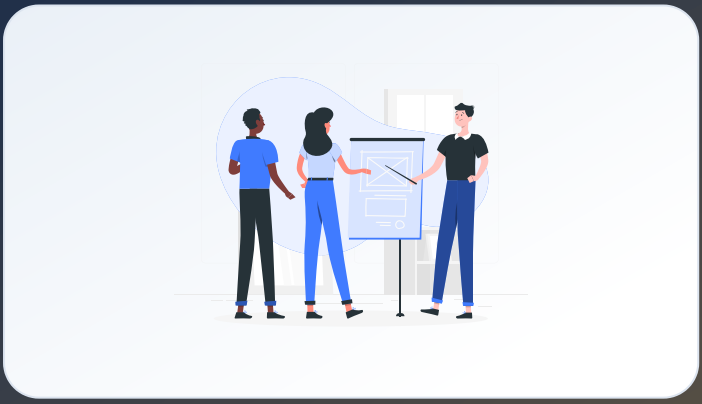
Every money term here is just plain sense with a label. Learn the word once, and the fear goes with it.

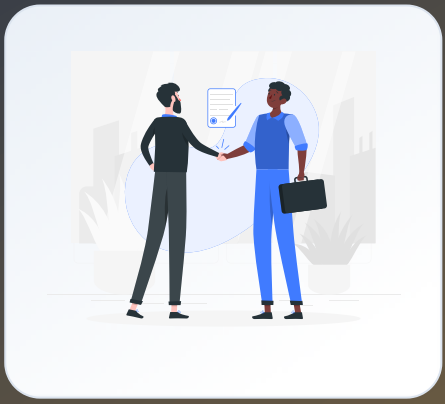
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MODULE 4 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

Winning Clients

Turning conversations into clients, sell by understanding, not pressuring. Uncover the real problem, and let the right solution sell itself.





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MODULE FOUR

Winning Clients

04

Most freelancers dislike selling because they think it means convincing or pressuring. It doesn't, good selling is just understanding, then helping.

Clients don't buy a service for its own sake, they buy a **solution to a problem**. This module replaces the sales pitch with a simple, repeatable **conversation**: understand the client's situation, uncover the real pain, help them picture success, and only then recommend. Sales stops being persuasion and becomes helping people make good decisions.



By the end, a participant can

- Run a structured sales conversation without pressure or scripts.
- Uncover a client's real pain and needs through good questions.
- Handle objections by returning to value, and agree a clear next step.

⏱ ~3 hrs facilitated | 3 facilitator-led + 2 self-directed | 🌍 Localised · PT · LT · SI

Youthpass · Communication + entrepreneurship

CONCEPTS IN THIS MODULE

1 · Sell the outcome, not the task
2 · Understand first, sell later
3 · The four-step conversation
4 · Step 1 · Discover the pain
5 · The 5-Why method
6 · Bridge today to the future
7 · Handle objections like a pro
8 · Closing is just the next step

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Discover Before You Sell, 60 min
F2 · Handling Objections, 60 min
F3 · Right Time to Recommend, 60 min
S1 · Reframe Your Pitch, 30 min
S2 · Your Discovery Questions, 40 min
+ Case study · resources · templates

WHAT CLIENTS ACTUALLY BUY

Sell the outcome, not the task

Clients don't buy your hours or your service, they buy the result it gives them. Nobody wants a logo; they want a business that looks trustworthy. Nobody wants a website; they want more customers. When you sell the task you compete on price. When you sell the outcome you become worth paying for.



Sell the Outcome, Not the Task

Clients don't buy your service — they buy the problem it solves.

THE SERVICE · what you do	THE OUTCOME · why they buy
"I build websites."	**"I help you look professional and win enquiries."**
"I create social posts."	**"I keep you visible so customers keep coming."**
"I do coaching sessions."	**"I help you make confident decisions, faster."**

The service is the method. The client's problem is the reason for buying — so lead with the reason.

The task is the method

Your service is how you deliver, it's not the reason anyone buys. Lead with the reason: the change the client will feel, not the deliverable you'll produce.

Outcomes escape price wars

Ten designers offer "a logo" at ten prices. Only you offer "a brand clients trust on sight." Sell that, and there's no one to compare you to.

The service is the method. The client's problem is the reason for buying, so lead with the reason.

THE MINDSET THAT WINS

Understand first, sell later

The instinct when meeting a client is to talk, to pitch, to prove yourself. The professionals do the opposite: they ask and listen first, and sell almost last. A conversation aimed at understanding builds trust and uncovers the real problem, which is exactly what lets you recommend something the client actually wants to buy.



Understand First, Sell Later

Drop the pitch — open a collaborative conversation instead.

THE PITCH MINDSET	THE SOLUTION MINDSET
"I'm here to sell you my service."	**"Let's find out together if I can help."**
The client gets guarded, cautious, and closed.	The client feels safe, opens up, and shares the real problem.

Success begins with understanding, not presenting.

Diagnose before you prescribe

A doctor who prescribes before examining is dangerous. Understand the client's situation fully before you propose anything, the recommendation is only as good as the diagnosis.

Listening is the sale

Every question that shows you understand builds more trust than a paragraph of pitching. People buy from those who clearly get their problem.

Approach every conversation to understand, not to pitch. Success begins with understanding, not presenting.

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

The four-step conversation

Selling well isn't a talent, it's a structure you can follow. Four steps: discover the pain, identify the need, help the client envision success, then recommend. Do the first three properly and the fourth, the actual pitch, almost makes itself. Most freelancers rush to step four; the professionals live in steps one to three.



The Four-Step Sales Conversation

A simplified Solution-Selling flow — understand fully before you recommend.

1 — Discover the pain
the real problem, not the symptom

2 — Identify the needs
what a solution must achieve

3 — Envision success
paint the future once it's solved

4 — Recommend the solution
bridge today to that future

Steps 1–3 are all questions. Get them right and step 4 — the actual selling — becomes the easy part.

Three steps of listening, one of talking

The first three steps are about understanding the client; only the last is about your solution. If step four feels hard, you rushed steps one to three.

Envision before you recommend

Before pitching, help the client picture the better future. Once they can see success clearly, your recommendation is simply the route to a place they already want to reach.

Understand fully before you recommend. Do steps 1–3 well and step 4 sells itself.

THE LONGEST STEP

Discover the pain

Clients rarely describe their real problem, they describe a symptom. “I need a new website” is a symptom; the pain underneath might be “I'm losing clients to competitors who look more professional.” Discovering that pain, with patient, open questions, is the longest and most important step, because you can only solve a problem you've actually reached.



Step 1 · Discover the Pain

The longest part — ask, dig, and reach the cause beneath the symptom.

Situation understand today	Root cause find the why	Impact is it worth fixing?
How do you handle this now?	When did it start?	How does it affect the business?
What's working about it?	What have you tried? Results?	What's it costing you / your team?

Clients first describe symptoms. Your job is the follow-up question that reaches the real cause.

Symptoms hide the pain

What a client first asks for is usually a symptom, not the cause. Keep asking gentle questions until you reach the real frustration underneath.

Ask, don't assume

It's tempting to assume you know the problem, you often don't. Let the client tell you, with open questions and genuine curiosity, before you decide what they need.

Clients describe symptoms; your follow-up questions reach the cause. Understand the pain before anything else.

REACH THE ROOT

The 5-Why method

When a client names a problem, ask “why?”, and keep asking, about five times. Each answer peels back a layer until you hit the root cause, which is usually very different from where you started. The 5-Why method is an effective, powerful tool for step one: it drills past the symptom to the real problem, where your real value lives.



The 5-Why Method

Follow-up questions that drill from the symptom down to the root cause.

SYMPTOM
“Our conversion rate is low.”

↘

WHY?
“The leads are poor quality.”

↘

WHY?
“They're not our target customers.”

↘

WHY?
“Our ads reach the wrong people.”

↘

ROOT CAUSE
“We don't clearly know who our ideal client is.”

Stop too early and you sell “better leads.” Reach the root and you sell the real fix — worth far more.

Five whys to the root

Each “why?” goes one layer deeper. By the fifth, you're usually at the true cause, not the surface complaint, and that's the problem worth solving.

The root is where the value is

Anyone can fix the symptom. Reaching the root cause is what lets you solve the problem properly, and charge for solving something that actually matters.

Drill past the symptom to the root cause, that's where the real problem, and your real value, live.

CONNECT THE GAP

Bridge today to the future

Once you understand the pain, your job is to build a bridge: from where the client is now (the problem) to where they want to be (the vision), with your solution as the span between. Connect what you recommend directly to the pain and future they described, and the sale stops being a pitch, it becomes the obvious way across.



Your Solution Is the Bridge

Span the gap from the client's painful today to the future they described.



Recommend only after pain, need and vision are clear — then the solution obviously bridges the gap.

Pain, need, vision, solution

Name the pain, state the need it creates, paint the future of it solved, then offer your solution as the bridge. In that order, the recommendation feels inevitable.

Recommend when the far side is clear

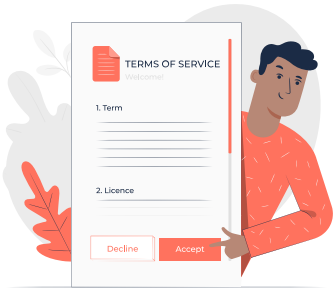
Don't propose your solution until the client can see the future they want. A bridge to nowhere sells nothing; a bridge to a place they crave sells itself.

Recommend only once pain, need and vision are clear, then connect the solution to exactly what you heard.

WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

Handle objections like a pro

An objection isn't a rejection, it's a question about value in disguise. “It's too expensive” usually means “I'm not yet sure it's worth it.” The professional never pushes back; they get curious, understand the real hesitation, and gently guide the conversation back to the outcome. Handled well, an objection is the moment a sale is actually made.



Handle Objections Like a Pro

An objection is a question in disguise — go back to the value, not the price.

⚠ “It's too expensive.”	They're unsure of the value. Explore what they're comparing against, then return to the pain it solves.
⚠ “I need to think about it.”	They lack a clear picture. Ask what specifically they'd like to think through, then fill that gap.
⚠ “Just send me a proposal.”	Often a polite exit. Confirm the pain and next step first, so the proposal answers a real need.

Never push for the decision — understand the hesitation, then guide.

An objection is a question

Behind “too expensive” or “let me think” is usually an unanswered question about value or risk. Answer the question, don't fight the objection.

Never push, get curious

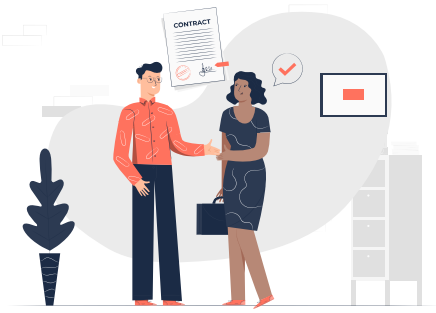
Pushing back makes clients defensive. Instead ask what's behind the hesitation, understanding the real concern is what dissolves it, not persuasion.

An objection is a question about value. Never push, understand the hesitation, then guide back to the outcome.

THE RIGHT NEXT STEP

Closing is just the next step

Forget the high-pressure “close.” In real client work, closing simply means agreeing the right next step together, a proposal, a trial, a follow-up call. If you've understood the pain and built the bridge, the next step is obvious and low-pressure. The goal isn't to force a yes today; it's to keep moving forward, together.



Closing Is Just the Next Step

Not a hard sell — a clear, agreed action you both walk toward.

toward a shared yes

Agree together 4
a booked call, a trial, a proposal, a shared yes

Propose the step 3
suggest one concrete next action, not “buy now”

Confirm value 2
check the solution fits what matters most

Summarise 1
reflect back the pain, need and vision you heard

The objective isn't to close today — it's to agree the right next step together.

Agree a next step, not a signature

You don't have to win everything today. A clear, agreed next step, a proposal, a small trial, a scheduled call, is a successful close that keeps momentum.

No pressure, just direction

If the earlier steps were done well, closing is natural. Simply propose the logical next step and check the client's happy to take it, no arm-twisting required.

The objective isn't to close today, it's to agree the right next step together.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Discover Before You Sell

60 min

Role-play & discussion

BASED ON

Selling a service · Solution Selling · the first client conversation · the 5-Why method.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Run a discovery conversation without pitching, and uncover a client's real pain and needs.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   The goal is to understand, not to sell. Today nobody is allowed to pitch, only ask and reflect.
2. **Demo the two mindsets** · 10 min
   Role-play a pitchy conversation, then a curious one. Ask the group to spot the difference in how the "client" responds.
3. **Discovery in pairs** · 20 min
   A plays a client with a vague complaint; B asks situation, cause and impact questions, no offer. Then swap.
4. **Reach the root** · 10 min
   Each pair uses follow-up questions (5-Why) to move from the symptom to the underlying cause.
5. **Debrief** · 10 min
   What was the real pain vs the first complaint? What was hardest? (Usually: resisting the urge to pitch.)
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person writes three discovery questions they'll use in a real conversation this week.

THE FRAMEWORK

Understand the situation, pain and needs before ever discussing a solution.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Printed Discovery Question Bank; role-play briefs (a client with an outdated website / few enquiries); a listening-tally sheet.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read the four-step framework. Prepare one relatable client scenario. Be ready to model a bad (pitchy) and a good (curious) conversation yourself.

Facilitator tips

The pitch reflex is universal, enforce "questions only." For shy learners, give the full question bank to read from. For migrant/Roma youth, discovery can happen in their community and first language, their networks are a real client source, not a limitation.

→ What can I do next?

Hold one real discovery conversation this week and write down the client's exact words about their problem.

Reflection & Youthpass

What did I learn by asking that I would have missed by pitching? **Youthpass:** Communication (active listening) + entrepreneurship, "I can learn the real problem instead of guessing."

★ Expert extension

Map each question you asked to a step (situation / cause / impact). Gaps show which part of the client's world you didn't yet understand, and where objections would later have come from.

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • Handling Objections

60 min

Practice & discussion

BASED ON

Handling objections by returning to value, pain and desired outcomes.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Respond to common objections without pressure, by reconnecting to the value discovered earlier.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   An objection isn't rejection, it's a request for more clarity, usually about value.
2. **The wrong instinct** · 10 min
   Show what pushing for a decision does. Then show acknowledging + exploring the concern instead.
3. **Objection stations** · 20 min
   In pairs, draw an objection card and practise: acknowledge → explore → return to the pain and outcomes.
4. **The price reframe** · 10 min
   Rehearse reconnecting "too expensive" to the cost of NOT solving the problem discovered earlier.
5. **Debrief** · 10 min
   Which responses felt honest and which felt like tricks? Keep only the honest ones.
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person writes their calm, value-based answer to the objection they fear most.

THE FRAMEWORK

An objection is a question about value, go back to the pain, not the price.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Objection cards ("too expensive", "need to think", "send a proposal"); the discovery notes from F1 to reconnect to.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read the objections section. Prepare 4–5 real objection cards. Have example value-based responses ready to model.

Facilitator tips

Some learners fear objections as personal rejection, reframe them as normal and useful. Ban manipulative closing tricks; everything here is about honesty and understanding. Let anxious learners script their exact sentence.

→ What can I do next?

Next time you hear an objection, ask one exploring question before you answer anything.

Reflection & Youthpass

Which objection do I fear most, and what honest question could I ask instead of defending? **Youthpass:** Communication + entrepreneurship, "I can turn a 'no' into a better conversation."

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Is It the Right Time to Recommend?

60 min

Judgement & role-play

BASED ON

Envisioning success and recommending a solution, knowing when the conversation is ready.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Judge whether pain, needs and vision are clear enough to recommend, and make a recommendation that bridges to them.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   Recommending too early is the classic mistake. First check: are pain, need and vision all clear?
2. **Ready or not?** · 15 min
   Groups read transcripts and decide if it's time to recommend. If not, what's still missing?
3. **Envision success** · 10 min
   Practise the step-3 questions that help a client picture the future once the problem is solved.
4. **Build the bridge** · 20 min
   Each learner writes a Pain → Need → Vision → Solution recommendation for one scenario, in the client's words.
5. **Share & refine** · 10 min
   A few read theirs aloud; the group checks the solution connects to what was actually heard.

THE FRAMEWORK

Recommend only when pain, need and vision are clear, then bridge today to the future.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The Pain→Need→Vision→Solution bridge sheet; short conversation transcripts (some ready to recommend, some not).

FACILITATOR PREP

Read steps 2–4. Prepare transcripts at different stages of readiness. Model one clear pain→solution bridge.

Facilitator tips

Watch for learners racing to the recommendation, send them back to gather the missing piece. Keep the vision step concrete and in the client's language, not yours.

→ What can I do next?

For a real prospect, write out their pain, need and vision before you draft any proposal.

Reflection & Youthpass

Was my last recommendation built on what the client said, or on what I wanted to sell? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can time my recommendation and connect it to the client's real goals."

★ Expert extension

A weak recommendation usually traces to a weak discovery. When a proposal is ignored, go back and find which of pain / need / vision you never actually established.

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Mini-mission

S1 • Reframe Your Pitch

Turn what you do into why it matters, the outcome the client actually buys.

1. **Write your service line**
   the plain "I do X" version.
2. **Ask "so that what?"**
   keep asking until you reach a real client outcome.
3. **Write the outcome line**
   "I help [client] achieve [result]."
4. **Test it on someone**
   does it make them ask "how?", that's a good sign.



→ Next

Use your outcome line as your intro everywhere, profile, proposals, first hellos.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

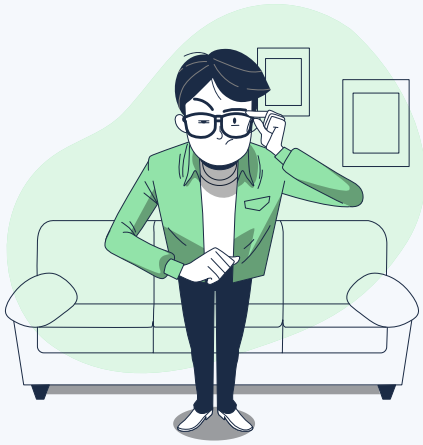
Did I understand before I recommended? Where did I talk when I should have asked?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~40 min · Planning exercise

S2 • Your Discovery Questions

Build the question set you'll bring to every client conversation.

1. **Pick a real client type**
   one kind of client you want more of.
2. **Write 2 questions per group**
   situation · root cause · impact, use the bank.
3. **Add a needs and vision question**
   "what would success look like in 6–12 months?"
4. **Rehearse staying quiet**
   ask, then let the silence do the work.



→ Next

Take your questions into one real conversation this week, and only listen.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Did I understand before I recommended? Where did I talk when I should have asked? **Youthpass:** "I can hold a sales conversation that helps the client decide, without pressure."

A WORKED CONVERSATION

The construction company's website

A freelancer who builds websites for small businesses gets an enquiry: a **local construction company** wants a new website because "the current one is outdated." The easy move is to quote for a website. Instead, the freelancer runs the four steps.

Discover the pain. "How are enquiries coming in now?" It turns out the site barely appears on Google and the few visitors never call. The outdated look is the *symptom*; the real pain is **not enough enquiries to plan the year or hire with confidence.**

Identify needs & envision success. What would success look like? "A steady stream of local enquiries, enough to keep the crew busy through winter." Now the goal is clear, and it's not "a prettier website."

Recommend. The freelancer bridges it back: "A new site built around local search, so people looking for a builder in your area find you and call, steadying your enquiries through the quiet months." Same website work, but sold as the outcome the client actually wanted, at a value that reflects it.

Composite scenario from the SHIFT partnership's real-life sales worksheet. Facilitator tip: run it live as a role-play (see F1), pausing at each step to ask "what's the real pain now?".



THE MODULE 4 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **Outcome, not the task →**
- **Discover the pain (not the symptom) →**
- **The 5-Why root cause →**
- **Bridge pain → solution →**

What you can borrow, for any service

1. **Don't quote the request.** The first ask ("a new website") is rarely the real need. Slow down and find it.
2. **Sell the outcome.** "Steady local enquiries" is worth far more than "a website", and it's what they actually want.
3. **Bridge it back.** Recommend in the client's own words, connecting the fix to the pain and the future they described.

Same work, sold differently: not "a website," but the steady enquiries the client was really after.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 4. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages) and also at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide · S1 ↗
- Discovery Question Bank · F1/S2 ↗

Reading & further learning

- Solution Selling, Michael Bosworth
- SPIN Selling, Neil Rackham
- The Mom Test, Rob Fitzpatrick
- To Sell Is Human, Daniel Pink

Practise the skill

- Role-play with a peer, questions only
- Record one real call and review your talk-vs-ask ratio
- Write pain→need→vision before any proposal
- Keep a "great questions" list that works

Where to find first clients

- Your existing network, tell them the outcome you deliver
- Local businesses that serve the same clients
- Community groups & the weekly market
- Referrals, every happy client feeds the top

Watch & listen (free)

- Solution Selling, explained
- SPIN questions, walkthrough
- The Mom Test, talk

Case study

A worked four-step conversation is on the previous page, the construction company's website. Run it live as a role-play with F1.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 2

First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide

A structure for reaching out for self-directed activity **S1**, stay curious, and aim only for the next step.

First-Contact / Cold-Call Guide

SHIFT · print & use

A structure, not a script, stay curious and aim only for the next step.

1 · Open warmly
Who you are, and one sentence on who you help.

2 · The reason
"I'm reaching out because businesses like yours often struggle with ..."

3 · Ask, don't pitch
One genuine question about their situation. Then listen.

4 · Offer a next step
"Would a short call to explore it be useful?", not "do you want to buy?"

5 · If not now
"No problem, may I follow up in a month?" Leave the door open.

▶ **Your goal is a conversation, never a hard sell. Curiosity opens more doors than pressure.**

1. **Open with the outcome**, one line on who you help and how, not a list of services.
2. **Ask, don't pitch**, one genuine question about their situation, then listen.
3. **Aim for a next step**, a short call to explore, never "do you want to buy?"

A first contact is a conversation, not a sale. Curiosity opens more doors than pressure.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 2

Discovery Question Bank

The questions for facilitator activity **F1** and self-directed **S2**. Ask one, then be quiet.

Discovery Question Bank

SHIFT · print & use

Bring these to any client conversation, ask, then be quiet.

SITUATION	" How are you handling this today? " What's working about it?
ROOT CAUSE	" When did you first notice it? " What have you tried, and what happened?
IMPACT	" How is it affecting the business? " What's it costing your team or customers?
NEEDS	" What would you like to achieve? " What must a solution deliver?
VISION	" What would success look like in 6–12 months? " How would that change things?

1. **Stay in questions** through steps 1–3, situation, cause, impact, needs, vision.
2. **Reach the root**, follow up until you're past the symptom to the real cause.
3. **Only then recommend**, once pain, need and vision are all clear.

Bring these to every client conversation. The best questions, and the silence after them, win the work.

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MODULE 5 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

Being Seen

Visibility & personal branding, communicate your value, understand your audience, and build a professional presence that creates opportunities.





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MODULE FIVE

Being Seen

05

Being good at what you do is only half of it. People also need to know who you are, what you offer, and why they should choose you.

This module is about **visibility**, how a freelancer communicates value, understands an audience, and builds a professional presence that creates opportunities. It moves through one clear question at a time: **Who am I? → What do I offer? → Who do I want to reach? → What should I communicate? → Where should I show it? → How can I improve it?** Everything is practical: participants work with their own skills, services and potential clients.



By the end, a participant can

- Write a clear personal brand statement and communicate it consistently.
- Build a simple content strategy, portfolio and professional profile.
- Use AI to support content, and target one ideal client with sharper messages.

~4 hrs facilitated | 4 facilitator-led + 3 self-directed | Localised · PT · LT · SI

Youthpass · Digital + communication

SUB-CHAPTERS IN THIS MODULE

1 · Personal branding framework
2 · A simple content strategy
3 · LinkedIn profile & outreach
4 · Practical social media marketing
5 · A no-code portfolio
6 · AI content-generation tools
7 · Your ideal-client avatar

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

F1 · Stand Out, 60 min
F2 · My E-Image, 60 min
F3 · Client Detective, 75 min
F4 · Who's Buying?, 60 min
S1 · Scroll Stoppers
S2 · E-Face
S3 · Fake-Imagine
+ Case study · resources · templates

BE KNOWN FOR SOMETHING

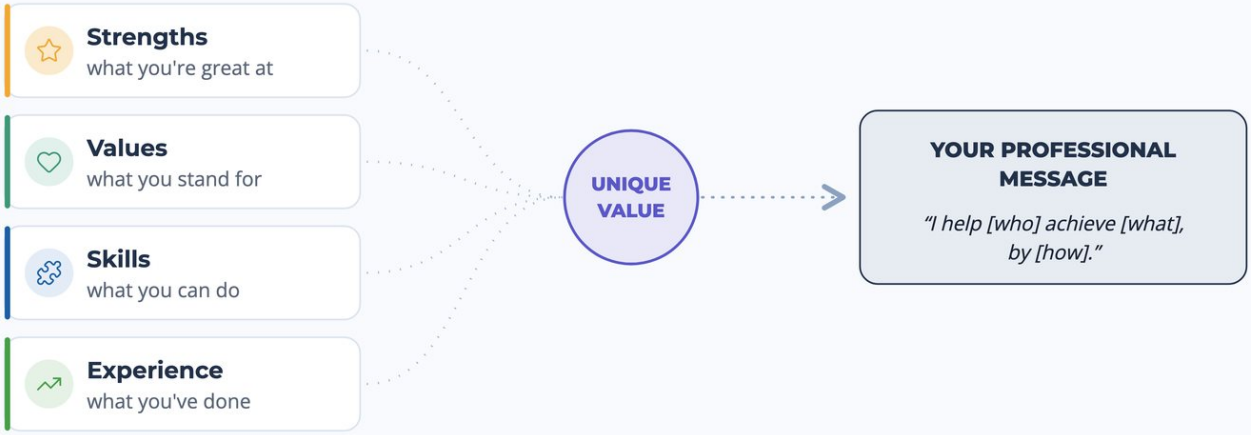
Your personal branding framework

A personal brand sounds grand, but it's simply this: what people reliably think of when they think of you. For a freelancer, a clear brand answers one question fast, “what do you do, and why you?” Built on your real strengths and values, it's not an act; it's the shortest honest way to be remembered and chosen.



Your Personal Brand

Four honest inputs combine into one clear professional message.



Not an artificial image — a clear, consistent way to say what makes your work valuable.

Brand = what they remember

Your brand is the impression left behind, the thing people say about you when you're not in the room. Decide what that should be, then be it consistently.

Built on truth, not hype

A strong personal brand isn't a mask, it's your genuine strengths and values, made clear and consistent. Authentic is memorable; performed is forgettable.

A clear personal brand isn't an act, it's a clear, honest way to say what makes your work valuable.

SHOW UP WITH A PLAN

A simple content strategy

Posting at random, when inspiration strikes, rarely builds anything. A simple content strategy fixes that without turning you into a marketer: start with your audience and what they care about, decide a few things you'll consistently talk about, and let each post's response tell you what to do more of. Small, consistent, audience-first beats sporadic and clever.





Audience first, post second

Don't start with "what shall I post?" Start with "who am I talking to, and what do they need?" The content follows from the audience, not the other way round.

Let the response teach you

Every post is a small experiment. Notice what people react to, and do more of that. Your audience will show you your strategy if you watch.

Start with the audience, not the post, then let each response teach you what to do next.

YOUR SHOPFRONT ONLINE

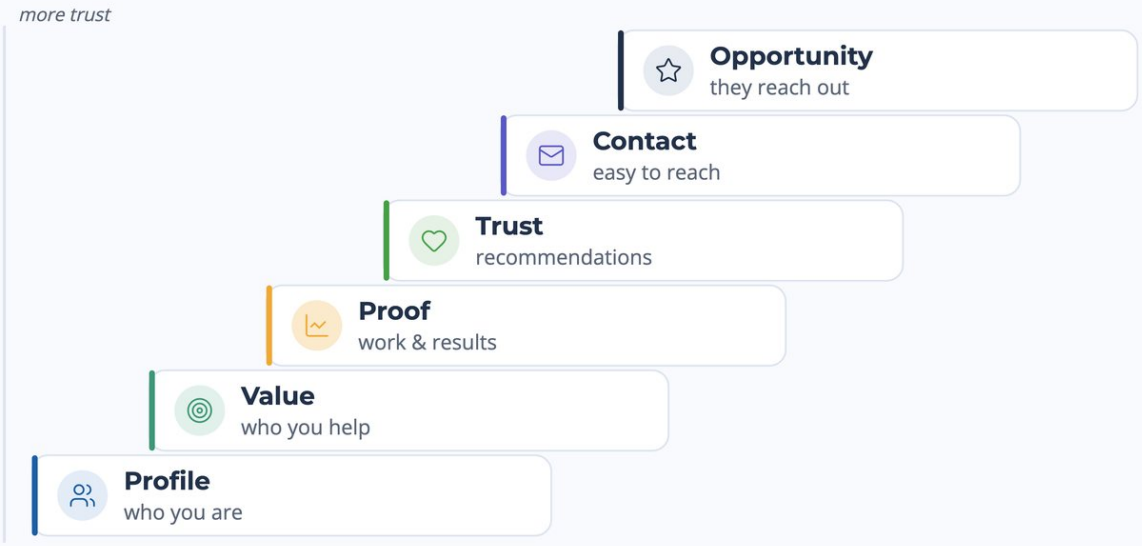
LinkedIn profile & outreach

For most freelancers, people check you online before they ever speak to you, and often that's LinkedIn. Treat your profile as a shopfront, not a CV: make it instantly clear who you help and how, show proof, and make it easy to get in touch. Then reach out to real people with genuine, personal messages, not copy-paste pitches.



Your Professional Profile

Each layer builds trust — turning a profile view into an opportunity.



People meet you online before they meet you in person — make the profile do the work.

A shopfront, not a CV

A CV lists your past; a shopfront sells your value. Your headline and top section should say who you help and how, at a glance, not just your job title.

Outreach = be human

Cold outreach works when it's personal and genuine: a real reason you're writing to this person. Copy-paste pitches get ignored; a human message gets a reply.

People meet you online first, make the profile do the work of building trust and inviting contact.

POST ON PURPOSE

Practical social media marketing

You don't need to be everywhere or go viral. Practical social media for freelancers is a simple loop: post with a purpose, watch what works, do more of that, and keep it sustainable. Pick one or two platforms where your clients actually are, show your work and your thinking, and treat every post as a small lesson about your audience.



Practical Social Media

Post on purpose, watch what works, and do more of it.



One or two platforms, done well

You can't be everywhere. Choose the one or two places your ideal clients actually spend time, and show up there properly, rather than spreading thin across all of them.

Observe, repeat, improve

Post, then look at what landed. Do more of what works, drop what doesn't. Social media is a feedback machine, use it to learn, not just to broadcast.

Post on purpose: observe what works, do more of it, and let every post teach you something.

PROOF THAT OPENS DOORS

A simple no-code portfolio

You don't need to code, or hire anyone, to have a portfolio. With today's no-code tools you can build a single clean page that shows who you are, what you can do, and how to reach you, in an afternoon. A portfolio is proof, and proof is what turns “sounds interesting” into “let's work together.” Simple and live beats perfect and imaginary.



A Simple No-Code Portfolio

One page where clients can see who you are and what you can do.

yourname.carrd.co

WHO I AM
one line: I help [who] with [what]

WHAT I CAN DO
skill · skill · skill
tools you use
services you offer

WHAT I HAVE DONE

HOW TO CONTACT ME: email · a booking link · your socials

Proof beats promises

Anyone can claim they're good. A portfolio shows it. A few real examples of your work do more to win a client than any amount of describing yourself.

No-code, no excuses

Free tools (Carrd, Notion, Canva sites and more) let you build a clean portfolio page with no coding and no cost. The barrier isn't skill or money, it's just starting.

One simple page that shows who you are and what you can do is proof, and proof opens doors.

FAST DRAFTS, YOUR VOICE

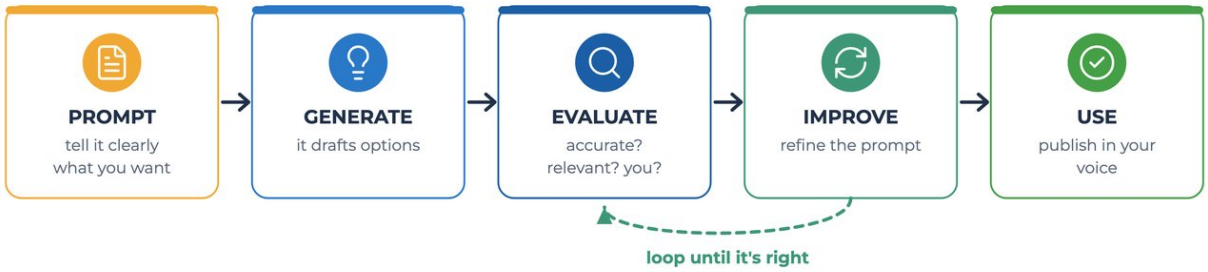
AI content-generation tools

AI can draft a post, an email, or an outline in seconds, a genuine time-saver for a busy freelancer. But it's a fast assistant, not the author. The skill is to prompt it clearly, judge what it gives you honestly, and rewrite it into your own voice before anything goes out. Use AI to start faster, never to publish blindly.



AI Content, Prompt, Then Judge

AI speeds up the draft; your judgement makes it good.



⚠ **Never publish what you haven't read, and never put private client data into the tool.**

Assistant, not author

AI is brilliant for first drafts and getting unstuck, and terrible as a final voice. Let it draft; you decide, edit, and make it yours before it's published.

Prompt, judge, own it

Good results come from clear prompts, honest judgement of the output (it's often generic or wrong), and rewriting into your voice. Never paste AI text straight out.

AI drafts fast, but you decide. Prompt clearly, judge honestly, and publish only in your own voice.

SPEAK TO ONE PERSON

Your ideal-client avatar

Trying to appeal to everyone means connecting with no one. An ideal-client avatar is a clear picture of the one person you most want to serve, their situation, their problem, what they want, where they hang out. Speak to that one person and, paradoxically, more people listen, because specific, relevant messages always beat vague, universal ones.



Your Ideal Client (Avatar)

You can't speak to everyone — picture one real person you want to reach.

Picture one real person

WHO?
age, work, life

NEED?
what they want

PROBLEM?
what frustrates them

BEHAVIOUR?
how they act online

WHERE?
where they look

MESSAGE?
what speaks to them

Know one client deeply and every post, service and message gets sharper.

Speak to one, reach many

When you write for one specific person, your message gets clear and relevant, and clarity attracts. Aim at everyone and you blur into background noise.

Picture them clearly

A good avatar is concrete: their situation, their problem, what they want, where they spend time, what words they use. The clearer the picture, the sharper everything you make.

You can't reach everyone at once. Picture one ideal client, and speak clearly to them.

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • Stand Out

60 min

Reflection & pair work

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 1 · Personal branding framework.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Identify their key strengths and unique value, and write a personal brand statement they can say consistently.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   You already have a brand, today we make it intentional and clear, not artificial.
2. **Strengths dump** · 10 min
   Each person lists what they're genuinely good at and what they're proud of, quantity first.
3. **Find the pattern** · 15 min
   In pairs, help each other spot the thread: strengths + values + skills + experience → a unique value.
4. **Write the statement** · 15 min
   Each person fills the worksheet: "I help [who] achieve [what] by [how]."
5. **Say it out loud** · 10 min
   Practise saying it to a partner; refine until it's clear and sounds like you.
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Everyone writes where they'll use this line first, profile, intro, proposal.

THE FRAMEWORK

Strengths → Values → Skills → Experience → Unique Value → Professional Message.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed Personal Brand Statement worksheet; sticky notes; pens.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 1. Prepare your own brand statement as a live example. Have a few strong/weak examples ready to contrast.

Facilitator tips

For low-confidence learners, start from the strengths a partner sees in them, it's often easier to hear than to claim. Keep it honest; the goal is clarity, not hype.

→ What can I do next?

Put your brand statement on your main profile this week, worded exactly the same way.

Reflection & Youthpass

What do I want to be known for, and does my statement say it clearly? **Youthpass:** Personal, social & learning-to-learn + entrepreneurship, "I can say clearly what makes my work valuable."

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • My E-Image

60 min

Feedback & adaptation

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 1, 6 & 7 · Perception, message and audience.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Explore how others currently perceive them, describe themselves in one clear sentence, and adapt the message for different audiences.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   People form an impression of you online in seconds, let's see what yours currently says.
2. **Perception check** · 15 min
   In small groups, look at each person's public presence and note the first impression it gives, honestly and kindly.
3. **One sentence** · 10 min
   Each person writes a single clear sentence describing who they are professionally.
4. **Adapt the message** · 15 min
   Rewrite that sentence for two different audiences (e.g. a local business vs a creative peer).
5. **Reflect** · 10 min
   Compare the impression you want with the one you give. What one change closes the gap?
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person names one concrete update to their online presence.

THE FRAMEWORK

Perception → one clear sentence → adapt to each audience.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Devices to view each other's public profiles; the brand statement from F1; note cards for feedback.

FACILITATOR PREP

Set ground rules for kind, useful feedback. Prepare one example of the same message adapted for two different audiences.

Facilitator tips

Keep feedback about the impression, not the person. For learners anxious about being seen, focus on small, doable changes (a clearer headline, one line about who they help).

→ What can I do next?

Make the one change you named to your online presence this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

What impression do I give, versus the one I want to give? **Youthpass:** Communication + personal/social competence, "I can present myself clearly and adapt my message."

★ Expert extension

Ask an AI tool to describe your professional identity from your public profile text. Does it match your intended message? The gap shows what to clarify.

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Client Detective

75 min

Analysis & strategy

BASED ON

Sub-chapters 2, 3 & 4 · Audience, profile and content.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Analyse an audience's behaviour and online content, and develop a simple content strategy tailored to them.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   Good content isn't about posting more, it's about understanding who it's for.
2. **Pick a subject** · 10 min
   Each group chooses a real business or creator whose audience they'll investigate.
3. **Detective work** · 25 min
   Analyse the audience, online behaviour and which content performs best, and why.
4. **Spot the strategy** · 15 min
   Infer the audience's need and the message that works; note what you'd change.
5. **Build a mini-strategy** · 15 min
   Draft a simple audience → need → message → content plan for that subject.
6. **Share** · 5 min
   Each group shares one insight about what makes content land with that audience.

THE FRAMEWORK

Audience → Need → Message → Content → Response → Improve.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Devices with internet; a chosen business/creator to analyse; the content-strategy loop printed as a worksheet.

FACILITATOR PREP

Pick 2–3 real, relatable profiles to analyse. Read sub-chapters 2–4. Prepare a simple "what to look for" checklist.

Facilitator tips

Steer groups away from "more followers" toward "the right audience." For learners new to platforms, pair them with a more confident peer.

→ What can I do next?

Apply the loop to your own next post: name the audience and their need before you create it.

Reflection & Youthpass

Whose need was I really answering with my last post, mine, or my audience's? **Youthpass:** Digital + entrepreneurship, "I can read an audience and plan content that fits it."

FACILITATOR-LED

F4 • Who's Buying?

60 min

Group analysis

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 7 · Ideal client / customer avatar.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Analyse local businesses, customers and competitors, and develop affordable, client-focused solutions.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 5 min
   You can't sell to everyone. Today we get specific about one ideal client.
2. **Pick a business** · 10 min
   Each group chooses a local business type and imagines its typical customer.
3. **Build the avatar** · 20 min
   Fill the avatar sheet: who they are, needs, problems, behaviour, where they look, what message fits.
4. **Find the gap** · 10 min
   Look at the business's branding, marketing and online presence, what's missing for that avatar?
5. **Design a solution** · 10 min
   Sketch one affordable, client-focused service or content idea that meets the avatar's need.
6. **Pitch it** · 5 min
   Each group presents its avatar and solution in one clear sentence.

THE FRAMEWORK

Who? → Need? → Problem? → Behaviour? → Message? → Solution?

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed Ideal Client Avatar sheet; access to local businesses' online presence; paper for solution sketches.

FACILITATOR PREP

Choose relatable local business types. Read sub-chapter 7. Prepare one worked avatar example.

Facilitator tips

Keep avatars grounded in real, local people, not clichés. For migrant/Roma learners, their own communities are a rich, real avatar source, not a limitation.

→ What can I do next?

Build a full avatar for the one client type you most want to attract, and write one post aimed only at them.

Reflection & Youthpass

Who exactly am I trying to reach, and do my content and services actually fit them? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + communication, "I can identify an ideal client and design for their needs."

SELF-DIRECTED · ~40 min · Content test

S1 • Scroll Stoppers

Test what your audience actually responds to, then do more of it.

1. **Review your posts**
   which got most reach and engagement?
2. **Make two new posts**
   copy what worked; change one thing.
3. **Publish and review**
   compare results after a few days.



→ Next

Keep a short list of what your audience reliably responds to.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which post, page or prompt actually reached the right people?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~45 min · Portfolio build

S2 • E-Face

Build a simple portfolio that proves what you can do.

1. **Pick a free tool**
   Carrd, a Google Site or a Notion page.
2. **Add the four parts**
   who I am · skills · work · contact.
3. **Share the link**
   put it in your bio and proposals.



→ Next

Update it whenever you finish a piece of work worth showing.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which post, page or prompt actually reached the right people?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · AI practice

S3 • Fake-Imagine

Use AI to draft faster, then make it yours before you publish.

1. **Write a clear prompt**
   audience, goal, tone, format.
2. **Generate and compare**
   make 2–3 versions; judge each.
3. **Edit into your voice**
   never publish it unread.



→ Next

Save the prompts that gave the best results as templates.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which post, page or prompt actually reached the right people? **Youthpass:** “I can create a professional presence, test content, and use digital and AI tools to be seen by the right audience.”

CASE STUDY

Justin Welsh: a business built on being seen

Justin Welsh left a corporate job and, instead of chasing clients one by one, decided to **become visible**. He picked one clear audience, solopreneurs and freelancers, and started publishing short, useful posts on LinkedIn and X, consistently, for years.

He didn't rely on a big budget or going viral. He ran the same loop this module teaches: **understand the audience, post something useful, watch what resonates, and improve.** A clear personal brand ("I help you build a one-person business") made him easy to understand and recommend. His profile did the selling; his content built the trust.

Over time that visibility turned into a **multi-million, one-person business**, courses and products bought by an audience that already knew, trusted and followed him. He never cold-pitched his way there. He was simply **seen, consistently, by the right people**.

Justin Welsh (justinwelsh.me). Facilitator tip: the principle scales down, even 20 local followers who trust you can bring your first paying clients.



THE MODULE 5 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **A clear personal brand →**
- **An audience-first content loop →**
- **A profile that builds trust →**
- **One ideal client, spoken to clearly →**

What you can borrow, at any size

1. **Pick one audience.** Being clear about who you're for beats trying to appeal to everyone.
2. **Be consistent, not viral.** Showing up usefully every week compounds far more than one big moment.
3. **Let visibility do the selling.** When the right people already trust you, you rarely have to chase them.

He didn't chase clients, he became visible to the right ones, consistently, until they came to him.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 5. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages) and also at shift.elnlab.eu/resources.

SHIFT printable templates

- Personal Brand Statement · F1 ↗
- Ideal Client Avatar · F4 ↗

Reading & further learning

- Building a StoryBrand, Donald Miller
- Show Your Work!, Austin Kleon
- Justin Welsh, the LinkedIn Operating System (paid online course, ~€150)
- Company of One, Paul Jarvis

Free tools to be seen

- Portfolio, Carrd / a Google Site / Notion
- Design, Canva (free) for posts & visuals
- Scheduling, Buffer / Meta & LinkedIn native
- AI drafts, a free AI chat tool (read before posting)

Where to build presence

- LinkedIn, clients meet you here first
- Instagram / TikTok, for visual & creative work
- A local directory or community group
- Your own simple portfolio page

Watch & listen (free)

- Personal branding for freelancers
- Justin Welsh, content that builds a business
- Build a free portfolio with Carrd

Case study

The “built on being seen” story on the previous page, Justin Welsh, pairs well with a local creator who grew through consistent, useful content.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 2

Your Personal Brand Statement

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F1 · Stand Out**. Fill each line, then combine into one clear sentence.

Your Personal Brand Statement

SHIFT · print & fill

Fill each line, then combine the last box into one clear sentence.

My top strengths
what I'm genuinely good at _____

My values
what I stand for / won't compromise _____

Who I help
the one kind of client I'm for _____

The result I create
the outcome they actually want _____

MY BRAND STATEMENT
"I help _____ achieve _____ by _____."

▶ **Say it the same way everywhere, profile, proposals, first hellos.**

1. **Start honest, not impressive**, your real strengths and values are the foundation.
2. **Name one kind of client**, "everyone" is not an audience.
3. **Lead with the result**, the outcome they want, not the task you do.

Combine the boxes into one sentence, and then say it the same way everywhere you show up.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 2

Ideal Client Avatar

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F4 · Who's Buying?**. Picture one real person and answer for them.

Ideal Client Avatar

SHIFT · print & fill

Picture one real person and answer for them, not for 'everyone'.

WHO ARE THEY?	age, work, situation
WHAT DO THEY NEED?	the goal they want
WHAT'S THEIR PROBLEM?	what frustrates them today
WHAT DO THEY VALUE?	what matters most to them
WHERE DO THEY LOOK?	the platforms & places they trust
WHAT MESSAGE FITS?	the words that speak to them

▶ **Now write one post, one service and one intro line aimed only at this person.**

1. **One person, not a crowd**, give them an age, a job, a situation.
2. **Focus on their problem**, what frustrates them is what you solve.
3. **Meet them where they look**, show up on the platforms they already trust.

Know one ideal client deeply, and your content, services and messages all get sharper at once.

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MODULE 6 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

You Belong Here

Identity, belonging, confidence and resilience, the person behind the business. Recognise the value you already carry, and find your place in entrepreneurial spaces.





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MODULE SIX

You Belong Here

06

Before the business tools comes the person behind the business, and the

Many young people have skills, ideas and informal experience but still feel "business is something other people do." This module works through one honest question at a time: **Do I belong here? → What do I bring? → Can I show it? → Can I take action? → Can I recover when things go wrong? → Can I take ownership?** It uses reflection, peer learning, role models and structured dialogue rather than long theory, and never assumes a participant already identifies as an entrepreneur.



By the end, a participant can

- Recognise their strengths, experiences and values as entrepreneurial resources.
- Build a support circle, communicate with confidence and make decisions under uncertainty.
- Recover from setbacks and take ownership of their professional direction.

~10 hrs facilitated | 6 facilitator-led + 4 self-directed | Localised · PT · LT · SI

Inclusive of NEET & first-time founders

SUB-CHAPTERS IN THIS MODULE

1 · Am I an entrepreneur?, identity
2 · Peer learning & accountability
3 · Psychological safety & belonging
4 · Role-model story library
5 · Cultural sensitivity & inclusion
6 · Safe group discussion
7 · Confidence in real situations
8 · Risk-taking & decision-making
9 · Resilience & learning from failure
10 · Freelancer → director mindset

ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

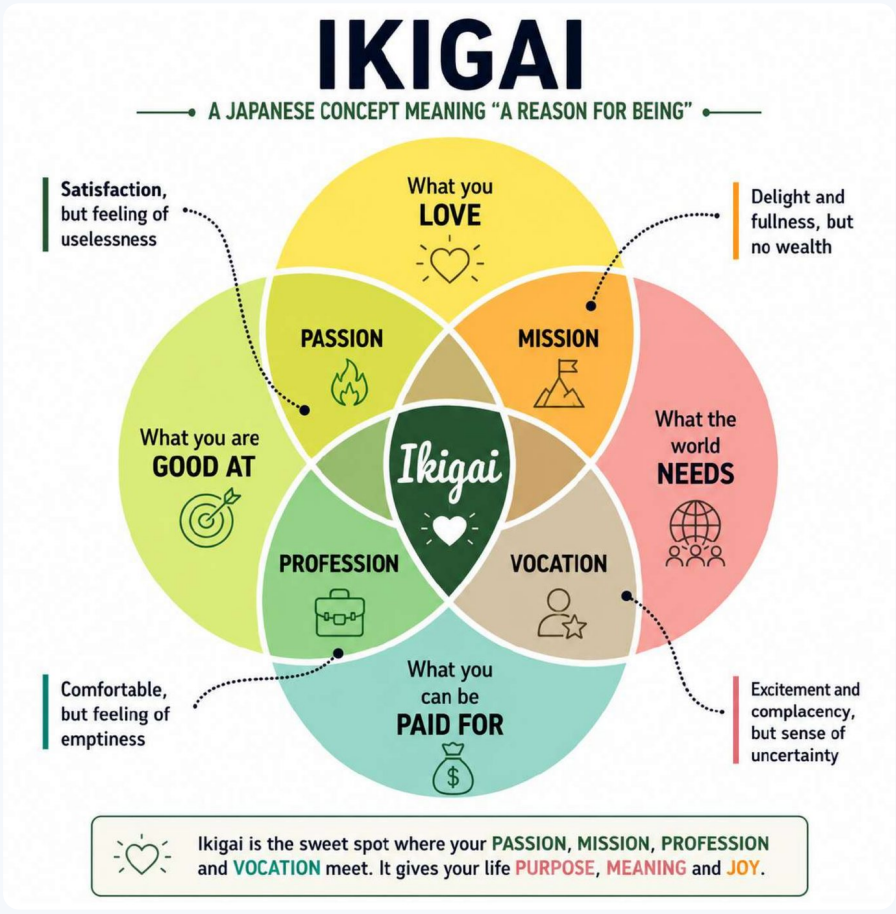
F1 · My Ikigai, 90 min
F2 · Decision SWOT, 90 min
F3 · Business Model Canvas, 90 min
F4 · Questions Before Answers, 90 min
F5 · Meet the Makers, 180 min
F6 · Culture Compass, 90 min
S1 · Lead Yourself Through Failure
S2 · Meet Your Inner Team
S3 · Build Your Learning Circle
S4 · Your Safe Facilitation Plan
+ Case study · resources · templates

RECOGNISE WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE

Am I an entrepreneur?

Many young people freelance for years without ever feeling like “an entrepreneur”, the word sounds like someone else, someone bolder. But entrepreneurship isn't a personality you're born with; it's a set of resources you can recognise and build. The Ikigai lens helps: where what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs and what pays overlap, that's your entrepreneurial ground.





You may already be one

Taking initiative, solving problems, finding clients, you may already do the things entrepreneurs do, without the label. Recognising that shrinks the gap between “someone like me” and “an entrepreneur.”

Ikigai finds the overlap

Ikigai maps four circles: what you love, what you're good at, what the world needs, what you can be paid for. Where they meet is a direction that's both meaningful and viable.

You may already hold entrepreneurial resources without using the word. Recognising them shrinks the distance to “entrepreneur.”

LEARN ALONGSIDE OTHERS

Peer learning & accountability

You don't have to build alone. The most useful support isn't a famous mentor or a big network, it's a few honest relationships where you learn together and hold each other accountable. Reframe the question from "who do I know that's powerful?" to "which few people will actually help me grow?" A small learning circle beats a big contact list.



My Entrepreneurial Learning Circle

You don't need one powerful contact — you build the right relationships.

ME — my circle

Inspire	Challenge	Support	Feedback	Learn with
people who inspire me	who push my thinking	people in my corner	who tell me the truth	peers on the same path

The goal isn't the biggest network — it's the right people and real learning relationships.

A few real relationships

Accountability and learning come from a handful of genuine peers, not hundreds of contacts. Two or three people who check in on you are worth more than a huge network.

Learn together, answer to each other

When you tell a peer what you'll do by when, you're far more likely to do it. Mutual accountability turns good intentions into finished work.

Reframe support from "who do I know that's powerful?" to "which few relationships will actually help me learn?"

EVERYONE STARTS SOMEWHERE

Psychological safety & belonging

People take entrepreneurial risks only when they feel safe enough to. Belonging isn't a nice extra; it's the ground that makes courage possible. Picture a participation ladder: everyone enters at a different rung, from just watching to leading, and the job, for a facilitator or a community, is to make the next step up feel safe enough to take.



The Participation Ladder

Confidence grows one step at a time — you can enter at any rung.

grow

- **Lead** — help guide others
- **Challenge** — question, respectfully
- **Share** — offer your ideas
- **Speak** — say one small thing
- **Think** — form your own view
- **Observe** — watch and get comfortable

Psychological safety = you can ask, try, disagree and recover without being judged.

Safety comes before courage

No one risks looking foolish in a space that feels unsafe. Belonging and psychological safety are what let people try, ask, and step up at all.

Everyone starts on a different rung

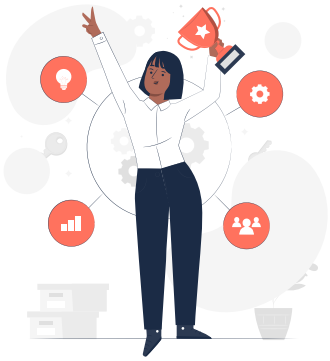
Some are ready to lead; others are just watching from the edge. There's no wrong rung, the goal is simply to make the next step feel possible.

Everyone can enter the ladder at a different rung. The job is to make the next step feel safe enough to take.

REAL STORIES, UPS AND DOWNS

Role-model story library

Nothing shrinks the distance to entrepreneurship like a real story from someone “like me.” But the useful stories aren't highlight reels, they include the setbacks, the doubts, the messy middle. A role-model's real journey, ups and downs, shows that success isn't a straight line and that the dips are survivable, which is exactly what a beginner needs to believe.



The Role Model Journey

Relatable stories show the ups AND downs, not just the highlight reel.



A role model only a few steps ahead, with a real setback in the story, is more useful than an unreachable success.

Show the dips, not just the peaks

A polished success story can intimidate more than inspire. A story with real setbacks in it says “this is normal, and you can get through it”, far more useful for a beginner.

“Someone like me” matters most

Relatable role models, similar background, similar start, do more than distant celebrities. Seeing someone a few steps ahead makes the path feel walkable.

Show the ups AND the downs. A story with a real setback in it is far more useful than a highlight reel.

MAKE MORE PEOPLE BELONG

Cultural sensitivity & inclusion

Freelancers increasingly work across cultures, with clients and collaborators who communicate differently. Cultural sensitivity isn't about memorising rules; it's a compass: staying curious, reading the situation, and adapting how you communicate with respect. Done well, it's both an inclusion skill and a professional edge, it makes more people feel they belong, and it wins you work across borders.





Adapt, don't assume

Directness, formality, timing, humour, these vary widely across cultures. Notice and adapt respectfully rather than assuming your normal is everyone's normal.

Inclusion is a professional skill

Making people from different backgrounds feel understood isn't just kind, it's good business. It widens who'll work with you and who feels they belong.

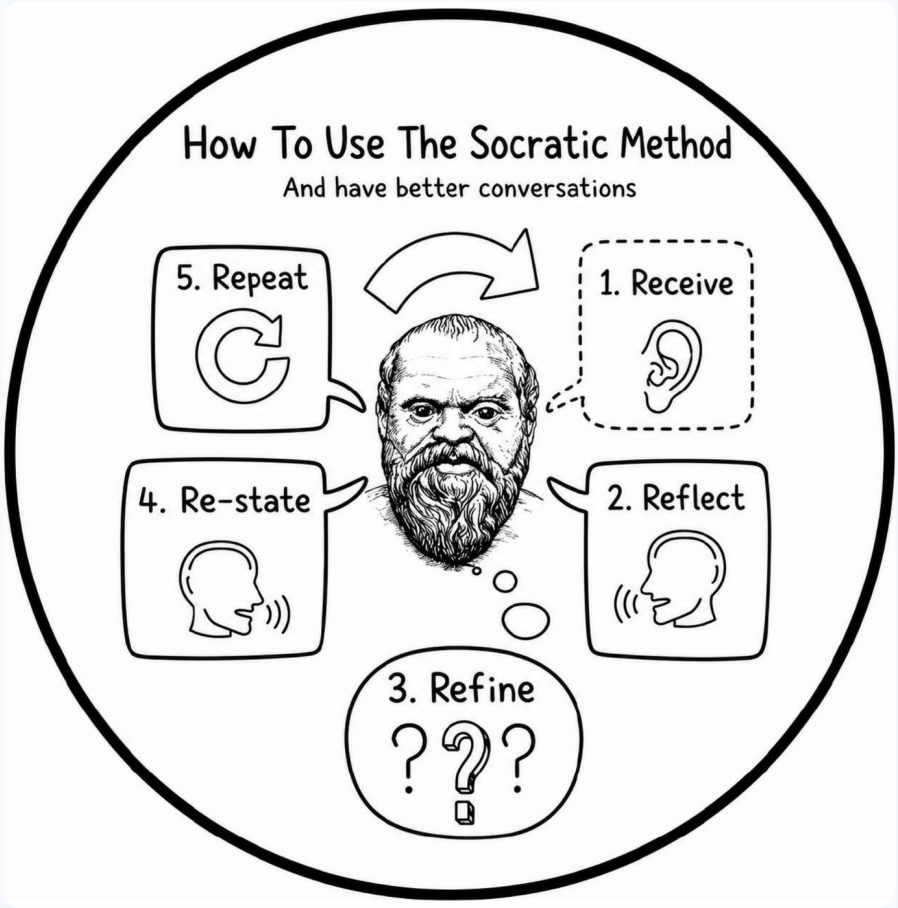
Adapting communication respectfully is both an inclusion skill and a professional one, it's how you make more people feel they belong.

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

Safe group discussion & perspective-taking

The best discussions aren't debates to win; they're loops of understanding. Using gentle, open questions (the Socratic way) and genuine perspective-taking, a group can explore ideas without anyone feeling attacked. The rhythm is simple: receive a view, reflect it back, refine your own, re-state, and go again, curiosity over point-scoring.





Questions over verdicts

Asking “what makes you see it that way?” opens a conversation; declaring someone wrong closes it. Good discussion runs on curious questions, not verdicts.

A loop, not a contest

Discussion isn't won; it's shared. Receive, reflect, refine, re-state, and repeat. The goal is deeper understanding on all sides, not a winner.

A good conversation is a loop, not a contest: receive, reflect, refine, re-state, and go again.

CONFIDENCE IS BUILT

Confidence in real situations

Confidence isn't a personality trait you either have or don't, and it isn't something you wait to feel. It's built: preparation + practice + action + reflection. You prepare, you rehearse, you act (nerves and all), then you reflect and improve, and confidence grows each loop. Waiting to "feel ready" is the trap; acting before you feel ready is the way.



What Confidence Really Is

Confidence is built, not felt into existence — and nerves are allowed.

Preparation know your stuff + **Practice** rehearse it + **Action** do it, nervous or not + **Reflection** learn from it = **CONFIDENCE**

NOT: Confidence = never feeling nervous
Nervousness doesn't mean you're incapable — the skill is acting while you feel it.

Confidence is built, not waited for

You won't wake up feeling confident. You build it by preparing, practising, acting despite nerves, and reflecting. Each cycle makes the next situation easier.

Nerves are allowed

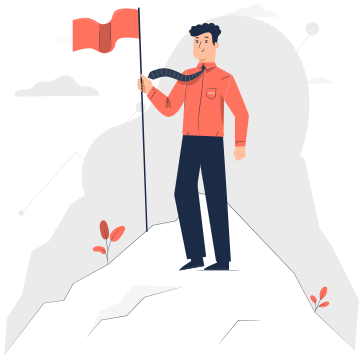
Feeling nervous isn't a sign you're not ready, even confident people feel it. Confidence isn't the absence of nerves; it's acting well alongside them.

Confidence = preparation + practice + action + reflection. It's built, not waited for, and nerves are allowed.

DECIDE WITH EYES OPEN

Risk-taking & decision-making

Entrepreneurship means deciding with incomplete information, but that doesn't mean gambling. A few honest minutes of structure turn a leap-in-the-dark into a calculated, ownable decision. A simple SWOT, your Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, laid out plainly, won't remove uncertainty, but it turns a vague fear into a clear-eyed choice you can stand behind.



STRENGTHS

- What do you do well?
- What unique resources can you draw on?
- What do others see as your strengths?

- I have skills and knowledge in my area of expertise.
- I am motivated, disciplined and ready to learn.
- I can work independently and manage my time.
- I am creative and good at solving problems.
- I have access to a laptop, Internet and digital tools.
- I can communicate my ideas clearly.
- I am adaptable and open to change.
- I have a strong personal network or can build one.
- I am passionate about my work and want to create value.

WEAKNESSES

- What could you improve?
- Where do you have fewer resources than others?
- What are others likely to see as weaknesses?

- I lack experience in running a business.
- I have limited financial resources.
- I find it hard to market myself or find clients.
- I sometimes struggle with procrastination and focus.
- I have limited knowledge about taxes, contracts and legal matters.
- I lack confidence in selling my services.
- I don't have enough time to learn everything at once.
- I may feel overwhelmed when facing many tasks.

OPPORTUNITIES

- What opportunities are open to you?
- What trends can you take advantage of?
- How can you turn your strengths into opportunities?

- Growing demand for freelancing and digital services.
- More people and companies work online.
- Online platforms (Upwork, Fiverr, LinkedIn) make it easier to find clients.
- I can build a personal brand on social media.
- Opportunities to learn new skills online (for free or low cost).
- I can offer packages, courses or products in the future.
- Partnerships and collaborations can help me grow faster.
- Access to start-up grants, incubators and mentoring.
- I can work from anywhere and create location freedom.
- More clients care about quality, creativity and personal connection.

THREATS

- What threats could harm you?
- What is your competition doing?
- What threats do your weaknesses expose you to?

- High competition in the freelance market.
- Clients may not pay on time or at all.
- Changes in algorithm and online platforms.
- Economic downturns can reduce client budgets.
- Rapid changes in technology and tools.
- Risk of burnout and lack of work–life balance.
- Scams and unreliable clients.
- Lack of contracts and legal protection.
- Dependence on one or two clients.
- Self-doubt and loss of motivation.
- Unclear pricing can lead to undervaluing my work.

Calculated, not reckless

Good risk-taking isn't bravado; it's deciding with eyes open. A quick, honest look at the upside and downside turns a gamble into a considered bet.

Own the decision

When you've weighed it honestly, you can own the outcome either way. A structured decision is one you can learn from, a blind gamble teaches you little.

You can't remove uncertainty, but a few honest minutes of SWOT turn a gamble into a calculated, ownable decision.

FALL, LEARN, CONTINUE

Resilience & learning from failure

Every freelancer hits setbacks, a lost client, a failed project, a quiet month. Resilience isn't pretending it doesn't hurt or “staying positive”; it's a process: pause, feel it, understand what happened, adjust, and take the next useful step. Failure treated this way becomes information, not identity, a bend in the road, not the end of it.



Bouncing Back From a Setback

A setback is information — pause, understand, and take the next useful step.



The goal isn't to pretend failure doesn't hurt — it's to recover, reflect and continue.

Bounce, don't break

Resilience is the bounce after a fall, not the absence of falling. The dip is normal; what matters is that you pause, learn, and take the next step.

Failure is information, not identity

A failure is something that happened, not something you are. Ask “what does this teach me?” instead of “what does this say about me?”

The goal isn't to pretend failure doesn't hurt, it's to pause, understand, adjust and take the next useful step.

SEE YOURSELF AS THE OWNER

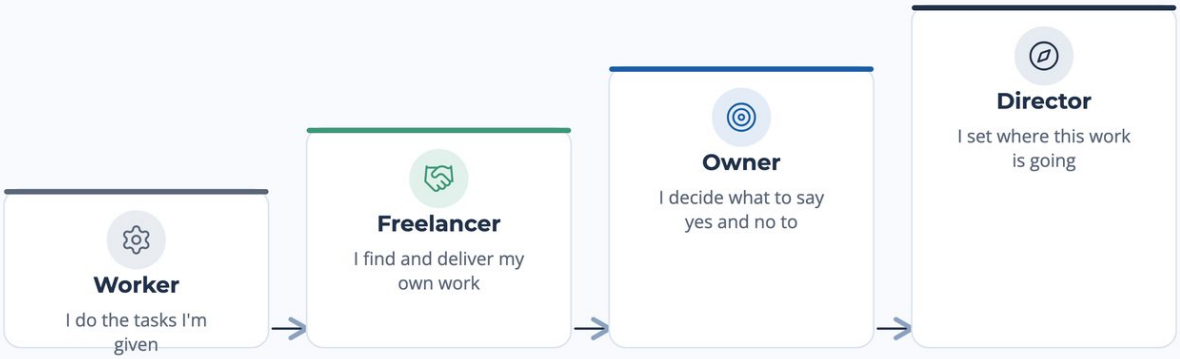
Freelancer → director (CEO) mindset

The final shift is how you see yourself: not a worker doing tasks for hire, but the director of your own professional life, someone who decides direction, not just delivers work. This is the real goal of the whole module, moving from "I take what comes" to "I choose where this goes." You don't need a company to be the CEO of your career.



From Task-Doer to Director

Ownership grows as you step back and decide the direction of your work.



The CEO mindset isn't a corporate title — it's ownership and agency over your own professional future.

From doing to directing

A worker executes tasks; a director sets direction. The CEO mindset is stepping back to decide the what and why of your work, not just grinding through the how.

You're already the CEO

Even as a solo freelancer, you set your prices, pick your clients, choose your path, that's a director's job. Own it, and you make bigger, braver decisions.

The real goal isn't "I feel more confident." It's "I see myself as someone who can decide my own professional future."

FACILITATOR-LED

F1 • My Ikigai

90 min

Reflection / identity

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 1 · Entrepreneurial identity.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Recognise their strengths, interests and experiences as entrepreneurial resources, and connect them to a possible opportunity.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   Everyone already carries value, today we find where yours overlaps into opportunity, gently.
2. **Four questions** · 25 min
   Each person fills the four Ikigai zones: what they love, are good at, the world needs, could be paid for.
3. **Find the overlaps** · 20 min
   In pairs, help each other spot where zones meet, passion, mission, profession, vocation.
4. **Name a possibility** · 20 min
   Each person writes one realistic opportunity their overlap points toward.
5. **Share & reflect** · 10 min
   Volunteers share one discovery; the group notices how much was already there.
6. **One small step** · 5 min
   Everyone writes one action to explore that possibility further.

THE FRAMEWORK

The Ikigai overlap: what you LOVE · are GOOD AT · the world NEEDS · you can be PAID FOR.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed My Ikigai worksheet; pens; optional printed Ikigai diagram.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 1. Complete your own Ikigai first as a live, honest example (including an imperfect one). Set a warm, non-judging tone.

Facilitator tips

Some learners undervalue informal experience (caring, helping, community work), name it explicitly as a real resource. Keep it exploratory; nobody has to "become" an entrepreneur today.

→ What can I do next?

Turn your Ikigai overlap into one sentence: "I could create value by _____ for _____."

Reflection & Youthpass

What did I discover I already carry that could create value for others? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + personal competence, "I can name what I already bring, and imagine where it could lead."

FACILITATOR-LED

F2 • Decision SWOT

90 min

Decision-making / reflection

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 8 · Risk-taking & decision-making.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Analyse a real entrepreneurial decision using SWOT, and finish with one concrete, ownable action.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   Good decisions aren't fearless, they're informed. Today we structure one real choice.
2. **Pick a real decision** · 10 min
   Each person names an actual decision they're weighing right now.
3. **Internal factors** · 20 min
   Map strengths and weaknesses, what's within your control and capability.
4. **External factors** · 20 min
   Map opportunities and threats, what's happening around the decision.
5. **Peer challenge** · 20 min
   In pairs, question each other's SWOT: what's missing, what's assumed?
6. **Decide the next action** · 10 min
   Each person commits to one concrete step, go, wait-and-test, or adjust.

THE FRAMEWORK

Decision → Strengths → Weaknesses → Opportunities → Threats → Action.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed Decision SWOT sheet; a real decision each participant is facing; pens.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 8. Prepare one worked SWOT of a realistic freelancer decision (e.g. "Should I lower my price to win this client?").

Facilitator tips

Watch for the two traps: impulsive "just do it" and frozen "only when it's certain." Steer toward a small, reversible next step rather than an all-or-nothing leap.

→ What can I do next?

Run a 5-minute SWOT before your next real freelance decision this week.

Reflection & Youthpass

How do I usually respond to uncertainty, and what would a calmer, calculated response look like? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can weigh a decision under uncertainty instead of freezing or acting blindly."

FACILITATOR-LED

F3 • Business Model Canvas

90 min

Business planning / systems

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 10 · Freelancer → director mindset (the Business Model Canvas tool itself is introduced in Module 1).

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Move from self-reflection into ownership of a real idea, seeing the whole business as one connected system.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   Step into the owner's chair: not "what task do I do?" but "what am I building?"
2. **Start with the customer** · 15 min
   Define the customer segment and the value proposition for them first.
3. **Map how value reaches them** · 20 min
   Channels, relationships and revenue, how you connect and get paid.
4. **Map what it takes** · 20 min
   Key resources, activities and partners that make the value possible.
5. **Cost & viability** · 15 min
   Add the main costs; check the model roughly holds together.
6. **Owner's decision** · 10 min
   Name one thing to say YES to and one to say NO to as the director of this idea.

THE FRAMEWORK

The nine blocks: customers, value, channels, relationships, revenue, resources, activities, partners, costs.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

The printed / drawn Business Model Canvas (nine blocks); sticky notes; a real or imagined service idea per person or group.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 10. Have the Business Model Canvas (from Module 1) ready as a large printout or wall drawing, and prepare one filled example.

Facilitator tips

Keep it a thinking tool, not a form to complete perfectly. For first-timers, one honest sticky note per block is enough, the systems view matters more than detail.

→ What can I do next?

Fill a rough BMC for your own idea and circle the one block you understand least.

Reflection & Youthpass

What am I actually building, and what decisions are mine to make about it? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship, "I can see my idea as a system, not just a task I perform."

★ Expert extension

Use an AI tool to pressure-test one block: "Here's my value proposition and customer, what am I missing?" Judge the answer; keep what's useful.

FACILITATOR-LED

F4 • Questions Before Answers

90 min

Structured dialogue / Socratic

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 6 · Safe group discussion & perspective-taking.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Practise structured Socratic dialogue, listening, open questioning and perspective-taking in a safe format.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   Today we practise questions before answers, understanding beats winning.
2. **Set safety** · 10 min
   Agree the rules: listen fully, ask before assuming, no ridicule, everyone can pass.
3. **Receive & reflect** · 20 min
   One person states a view; others ask genuine questions to understand, not to attack.
4. **Refine & re-state** · 25 min
   Speakers refine their view aloud; listeners re-state it fairly before responding.
5. **Repeat with a new voice** · 15 min
   Rotate so quieter participants lead a round.
6. **Debrief** · 10 min
   What changed in your thinking? What did a good question do?

THE FRAMEWORK

The Socratic cycle: Receive → Reflect → Refine → Re-state → Repeat.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

A discussion prompt with no single right answer; the Socratic-cycle card; simple ground rules on cards.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 6. Choose a relevant, low-stakes but real dilemma (e.g. “Is it ever OK to work for free?”). Agree ground rules for safety.

Facilitator tips

Protect quieter voices actively, invite, don't spotlight. Model curiosity yourself. If it heats up, return to “re-state the other view fairly” before continuing.

→ What can I do next?

In your next disagreement, ask one real question before you give your opinion.

Reflection & Youthpass

When did a question, not an argument, actually change my mind? **Youthpass:** Citizenship + communication, “I can disagree respectfully and let a conversation change my thinking.”

FACILITATOR-LED

F5 • Meet the Makers

180 min

Role-play / role models

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 4 · Role-model story library.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Research a real freelancer or entrepreneur and explore their journey through a simulated talk-show role-play.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 15 min
   We learn most from people a few steps ahead, today we step into their shoes.
2. **Discover & research** · 45 min
   Groups research a chosen freelancer/entrepreneur: path, skills, challenges, achievements.
3. **Create & become** · 40 min
   Each group builds a short profile and picks one member to represent the role model.
4. **Interview & guess** · 50 min
   In a mock talk show, others ask questions, listen for clues and identify the story.
5. **Reflect & apply** · 25 min
   Discuss the different journeys, what ideas or actions can each person borrow?
6. **Take one lesson** · 5 min
   Everyone writes one lesson from a maker they'll apply to their own path.

THE FRAMEWORK

Discover & research → create & become → interview & guess → reflect & apply.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Internet for research; simple "talk show" set-up; role cards; the role-model journey template.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 4. Prepare a shortlist of relatable, reachable role models (local, migrant, young, creative) so no group is stuck. Allow the full 180 minutes.

Facilitator tips

Steer groups away from billionaires toward reachable stories. Celebrate setbacks in the stories, they're the most useful part. Migrant and community role models are a strength here, not a limitation.

→ What can I do next?

Reach out to one relatable maker (a message, a comment, a follow) and note one thing you'd ask them.

Reflection & Youthpass

Whose journey felt reachable to me, and why? **Youthpass:** Entrepreneurship + cultural awareness, "I can learn from relatable journeys and see myself in them."

FACILITATOR-LED

F6 • Culture Compass

90 min

Inclusive communication

BASED ON

Sub-chapter 5 · Cultural sensitivity & inclusion.

BY THE END, PARTICIPANTS CAN

Create practical guidelines for inclusive digital communication across language, visuals, representation and accessibility.

Step by step

1. **Frame it** · 10 min
   The way we communicate can quietly include or exclude, today we make it intentional.
2. **Read the examples** · 20 min
   In groups, examine real posts against the five compass points.
3. **Spot the exclusion** · 20 min
   Identify where language, visuals or assumptions might exclude someone.
4. **Build the compass** · 25 min
   Each group drafts practical guidelines for inclusive digital communication.
5. **Share & combine** · 10 min
   Merge group guidelines into one shared class "culture compass."
6. **Commit** · 5 min
   Each person picks one change for their own online communication.

THE FRAMEWORK

The compass: Language · Representation · Accessibility · Assumptions · Stereotypes.

→ See the full diagram

MATERIALS

Real social posts / websites to critique; the compass template; sticky notes.

FACILITATOR PREP

Read sub-chapter 5. Gather a few real (anonymised) examples, some inclusive, some not, to analyse together.

Facilitator tips

Keep it constructive, not a purity test, the aim is awareness and habit, not fear of getting it wrong. Use the group's own diverse backgrounds as the richest source of insight.

→ What can I do next?

Apply the five compass questions to your next post before you publish it.

Reflection & Youthpass

Whose perspective am I missing when I communicate, and how would I include it? **Youthpass:** Cultural awareness + citizenship, "I can communicate so more people feel included, not excluded."

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Reflective mission

S1 • Lead Yourself Through Failure

Turn a hard setback into a plan: name it, separate the thoughts, and choose one next step.

1. **Name the setback**
   what happened, plainly.
2. **Split the thoughts**
   automatic vs supportive thinking.
3. **Recovery plan**
   one next useful step.



Builds on

Sub-chapters 7 and 9 · confidence and resilience.

✎ **Your workings**

Reflection & Youthpass

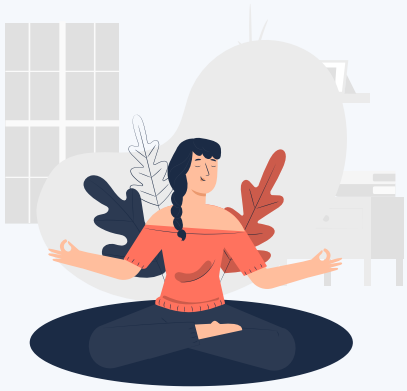
Which inner voice, relationship or condition most changes how you show up?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~30 min · Reflective mission

S2 • Meet Your Inner Team

Meet the inner voices that drive you, and choose which one leads in a hard moment.

1. **Map your voices**
   the critic, the fearful, the brave.
2. **Notice the trigger**
   what sets each one off.
3. **Choose who leads**
   before a hard moment.



Builds on

Sub-chapter 7 · confidence in real situations.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which inner voice, relationship or condition most changes how you show up?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~35 min · Reflective mission

S3 • Build Your Learning Circle

Map your support network, spot the gaps, and build a few real learning relationships.

1. **Map who's there**
   inspire, challenge, support, feedback.
2. **Find the gaps**
   which role is missing?
3. **Reach out to 3–5**
   plus a simple accountability plan.



Builds on

Sub-chapter 2 · peer learning and accountability.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which inner voice, relationship or condition most changes how you show up?

SELF-DIRECTED · ~35 min · Reflective mission

S4 • Your Safe Facilitation Plan

Design the conditions that make a group feel safe enough to take part.

1. **Recall an unsafe moment**
   what made it feel that way.
2. **Design conditions**
   trust, gradual steps, no shame.
3. **Write your plan**
   for a group you'll lead or join.



Builds on

Sub-chapter 3 · psychological safety and belonging.

✎ Your workings

Reflection & Youthpass

Which inner voice, relationship or condition most changes how you show up? **Youthpass:** "I strengthened my personal, social and learning-to-learn competence, self-awareness, emotional awareness, peer learning and recovering from setbacks."

CASE STUDY

Sophia Amoruso: from “not the type” to founder, and back

Sophia Amoruso did not look like anyone's picture of an entrepreneur. No degree, a string of odd jobs, and, by her own account, no plan. Around 2006 she started selling curated vintage clothing on eBay from home. That small, skill-based hustle grew into **Nasty Gal**, a fashion business that reached tens of millions in sales, and a best-selling book, *#Girlboss* (2014).

Then it went wrong. The company over-expanded, and in **2016 Nasty Gal filed for bankruptcy**. For many people that would be the end of the story. Instead, Amoruso treated the failure as information: she reflected publicly on what she'd misjudged, and started again, building **Girlboss**, a media and community platform for other first-time founders.

Her arc is the whole of Module 6 in one life: an **unconventional identity** that still created value, real **risk-taking**, a very public **setback**, and the **resilience and ownership** to reflect and rebuild.

Sophia Amoruso, Nasty Gal / Girlboss. Facilitator note: pair this with a local, “a-few-steps-ahead” maker from F5, the module's own guidance is that reachable role models inspire action more than famous ones.



THE MODULE 6 IDEAS IN THIS STORY

- **An unconventional entrepreneurial identity →**
- **Calculated (and un-calculated) risk →**
- **A very public setback →**
- **Ownership, deciding the next direction →**

What you can borrow, whatever your starting point

1. **Start with a skill, not a title.** A small, real hustle can become an identity long before you feel “official.”
2. **Treat failure as data.** The useful question after a setback is “what can I learn and control next?”
3. **Own the direction.** Rebuilding meant choosing what to build next, that's the director's mindset.

You don't have to look the part to belong. You need a skill worth sharing, the nerve to try, and the resilience to begin again.

GO DEEPER

Resource library

Everything to go further with Module 6. The **printable templates are built into this booklet** (next pages).

SHIFT printable templates

- My Ikigai, F1 ↗
- Decision SWOT, F2 ↗

Reading & further learning

- #Girlboss, Sophia Amoruso
- Mindset, Carol Dweck (growth mindset)
- The Culture Map, Erin Meyer
- EntreComp: the EU entrepreneurship competence framework

Frameworks used here

- Ikigai, purpose & overlap
- SWOT, structured decision-making
- Business Model Canvas, Strategyzer
- The Socratic method, structured dialogue

Where to build belonging

- Local youth / freelancer communities
- Peer accountability pairs & groups
- Mentoring & role-model networks
- Online communities of practice

Watch & listen (free)

- Ikigai, explained simply
- Carol Dweck, the power of "yet"
- The Business Model Canvas in 2 minutes

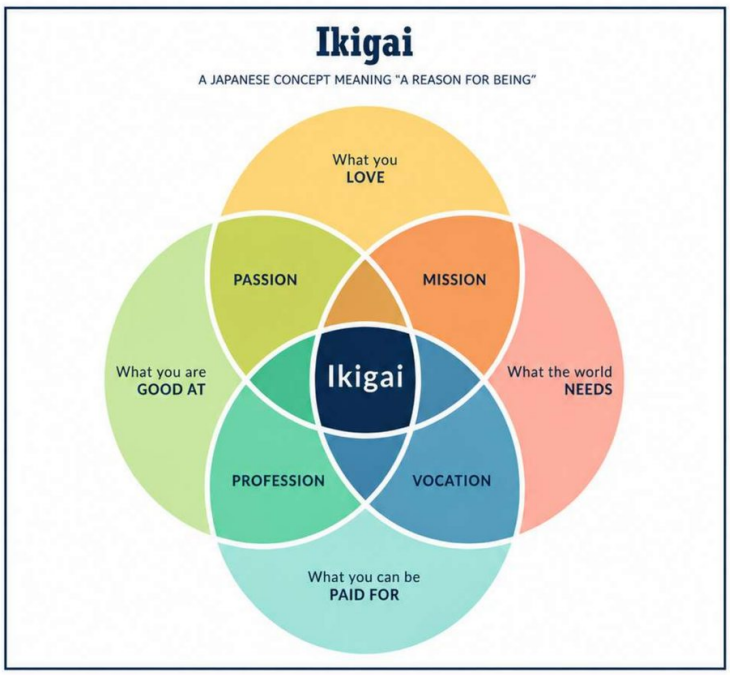
Case study

The identity → failure → resilience story on the previous page, Sophia Amoruso, should always be paired with a reachable, local maker from F5.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 1 OF 2

My Ikigai worksheet

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F1 · My Ikigai**. Fill each circle honestly, then look for where they overlap.



WHAT YOU LOVE	WHAT YOU CAN BE PAID FOR
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS	WHAT YOU ARE GOOD AT
1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

1. **Be honest, not impressive**, informal and community experience counts as real value.
2. **Look for overlaps**, passion, mission, profession and vocation live where circles meet.
3. **Name one possibility**, turn the overlap into a single realistic opportunity.

Your Ikigai isn't a fixed answer, it's a lens for noticing the value you already carry into work.

PRINTABLE TEMPLATE · 2 OF 2

Decision SWOT worksheet

The worksheet for facilitator activity **F2 · Decision SWOT**. Write the decision at the top, then fill all four boxes before you choose.



1. **Strengths & weaknesses** are internal, about you and what you can control.
2. **Opportunities & threats** are external, about the market and situation.
3. **End with one action**, go, test small, or adjust. A SWOT with no decision is just a list.

A few honest minutes across four boxes turns a nervous gamble into a calculated, ownable decision.

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