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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.

Authors: Rajesh Pathak, Riya Raj, Andrej Korpar, Marija Stravinskaite, Petar Rizov.

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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

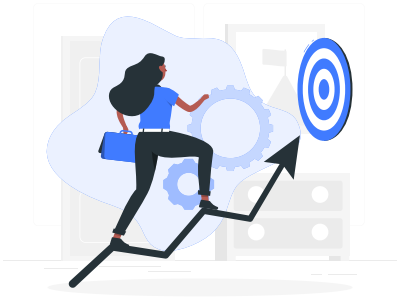
ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

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. That binary is the first thing to dismantle. A business is a journey with recognisable stages, and the single most useful thing you can do today is name honestly which stage you are actually in.



WHAT IT IS

There are four stages. **Starting**: can anyone pay you at all? **Stabilising**: repeat clients and predictable months. **Structuring**: pricing, processes and an offer that doesn't depend on you improvising every time. **Growing**: deliberately becoming bigger than yourself, with systems, products or a team. You can sit in different stages for different services at once, and that is completely normal.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

The classic mistake is solving the wrong stage's problem. Someone still Starting agonises over a logo, a business name and a website, all Structuring tasks, while quietly avoiding the only thing that matters at their stage: getting one person to pay them. Naming your stage cuts through that. It tells you the one problem worth your energy, and gives you permission to ignore the rest for now.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Judging yourself against Growing-stage founders you follow online. Their problems (hiring, systems, scale) are not your problems yet, and copying them wastes the exact energy your real stage needs. Compare yourself to where *you* were last month, not to someone three stages ahead.

✎ Do this now

Name your stage in one word. Then write the single most useful next step for that stage, and nothing else on the list until it is done.

Facilitator note

Ask each participant to place themselves on the journey out loud and say why. Others will often see their stage more accurately than they do, that gap is the lesson.

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

KNOW YOUR STAGE

The freelancer journey

HOW IT WORKS

Find the stage that matches your **reality**, not your ambition. If clients don't yet pay reliably, you are Starting, no matter how polished your brand looks. Read the journey from left to right, and be honest about where the arrow actually is for you today.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

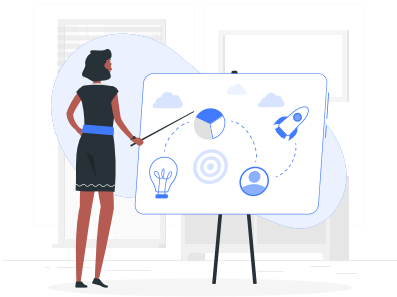
Marco calls himself “a struggling entrepreneur”. On the journey he is simply at **Starting**: two paid gigs, no repeat clients. Naming that changes everything, he stops redesigning his logo and spends the week asking five past contacts for one small paid job. That is the Starting-stage move, and it works.

You are not behind, you are somewhere specific. Name the stage, solve its one real problem, and the next stage takes care of itself.

YOUR BUSINESS ON ONE PAGE

The Business Model Canvas

You can't improve what you can't see. The Business Model Canvas puts your entire business, how you create value, deliver it, get paid and stay afloat, onto a single page you can actually read and change. The standard canvas is built for startups with teams; here it is rewritten so a solo freelancer can fill every block with something true.



WHAT IT IS

Nine blocks, in plain freelancer language: **who you help**, the **value** you create for them, the **channels** you reach them through, the **relationship** you keep, the **revenue** you earn, the **resources** and **activities** the work needs, the **partners** who help you deliver, and your **costs**. Together they show not nine separate facts, but one connected system.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Most freelancers hold their business only in their head, which makes every decision feel heavy and every weak spot invisible. On one page, patterns jump out: you're brilliant at delivery but have no channel, or you earn well but a single client is your whole revenue. Seeing the system is the first step to changing it deliberately instead of reacting.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Filling it like a form to be completed perfectly, or starting on the left with costs and activities. It is a thinking tool, not homework. One honest sticky note per block beats a tidy, lifeless grid, and the customer side must come first or the rest is guesswork.

✎ Do this now

Draw the nine blocks on one page and fill each with a single sticky note. Then circle the block you understand least, that is where your next week's attention belongs.

Facilitator note

Have participants present their canvas in 60 seconds. If they can't explain how the blocks connect, the model isn't clear yet, prompt them to find the one link that makes it a system.

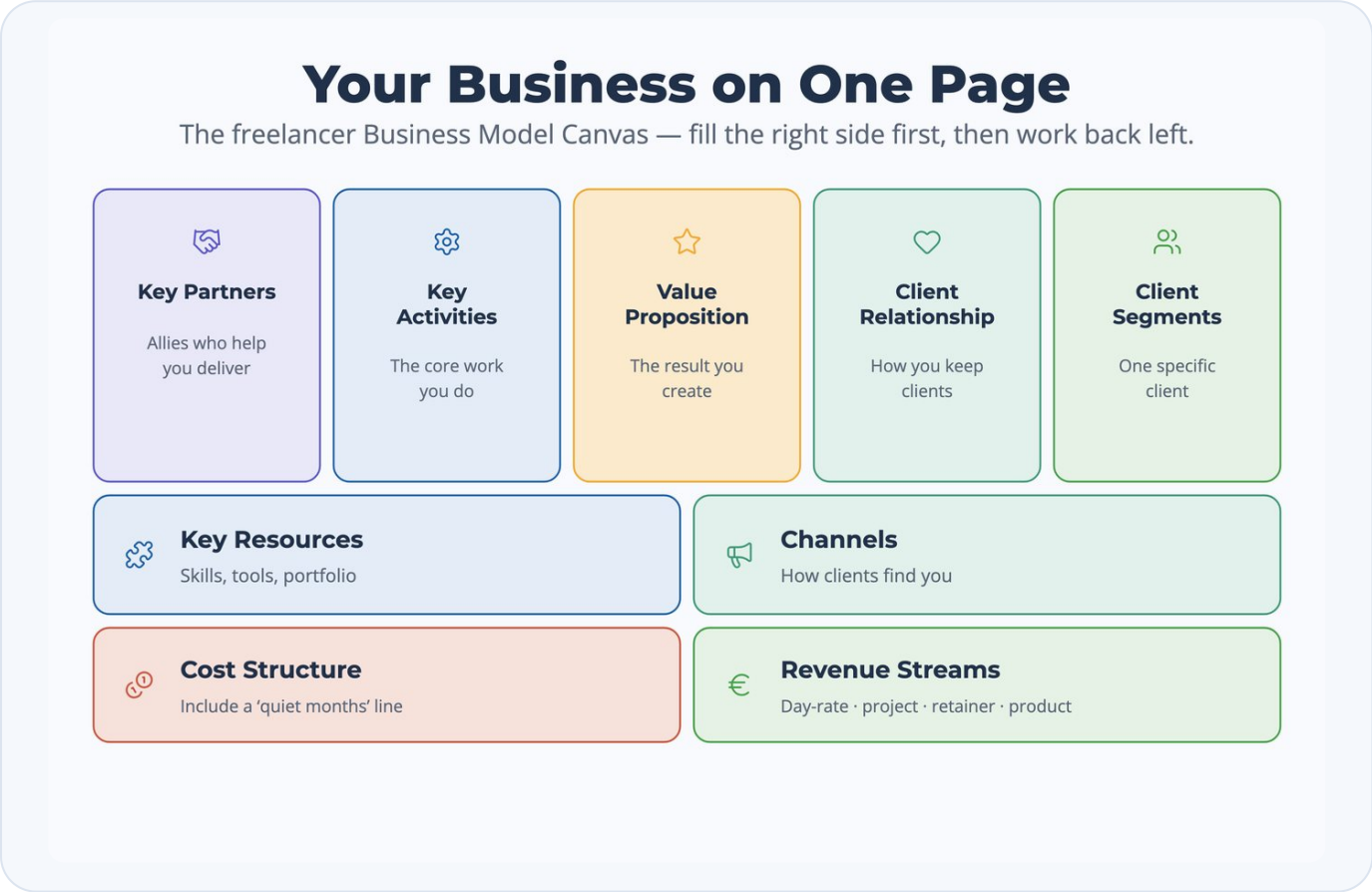
Your whole business fits on one page. Fill the right side first, then work back, and read it as one connected system.

YOUR BUSINESS ON ONE PAGE

The Business Model Canvas

HOW IT WORKS

Fill the **right side first**, the customer-facing blocks, because everything else exists to serve them. Start with who you help and the value you create, then how you reach and keep them, then how you get paid. Only then move left to what it takes to deliver. Use a sticky note per block so you can move things as your thinking sharpens.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Sofia, a freelance editor, fills hers and spots it instantly: strong value, happy clients, but her only channel is one agency that sends all her work. One page reveals her real risk isn't skill, it's a single point of failure, so her next move is obvious: build a second channel before that one dries up.

A business you can see on one page is a business you can steer. Get it out of your head, fill the right side first, and read it as a whole.

BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Finding your niche

Most freelancers describe themselves by their tool, “a designer”, “a developer”, “a marketer”. It feels safe, but it makes you one of thousands, judged on price. A niche is how you stop competing on price and start being chosen. This sub-chapter is about finding yours honestly, and saying it in one sentence.



WHAT IT IS

A niche is not a smaller market, it is a **sharper** one. It is the specific overlap of three things: what you do best, the people you most want to help, and a problem those people will pay to solve. Choosing a niche is a **positioning** decision, not a ceiling on ambition, you can always widen later, from a position of strength.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

When you serve “everyone”, your offer sounds generic, you compete on price, and referrals can't describe you. A clear niche flips all three at once: clients self-select, you become the obvious choice for one problem, and you can charge for **expertise** instead of hours. For a young freelancer with a small network, a niche is the fastest, cheapest way to become known for something.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two traps. First, confusing a niche with a demographic, “students” or “young people” is an audience, not a niche, until you name their problem. Second, picking a niche you like that nobody pays for. Before you commit, test that the problem has money behind it.

✎ Do this now

Fill one sentence: “I help [who] who struggle with [problem] to [result].” Can't finish it? That is the single most useful thing to fix this week.

Facilitator note

Have each participant say their sentence out loud. If the room can't immediately picture the client, it is still too broad, push for one more level of specific.

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

BE THE OBVIOUS CHOICE

Finding your niche

HOW IT WORKS

Answer three honest questions: **what you do best**, **who you genuinely want to help**, and **which of their problems is worth paying to solve**. Your niche is the small centre where all three overlap. If only two overlap, that is your warning sign: skill and client but no paid problem is a hobby; skill and problem but no clear client is hard to sell.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

"Freelance designer" says nothing. Ana narrows it: **"I build simple one-page websites for Lisbon food trucks that turn passers-by into orders."** Same skills, but now a food-truck owner hears their exact problem, refers her in a single sentence, and doesn't blink at the price, because she's not a designer, she's *their* designer.

You can't be the best at everything. Pick the one overlap you can own, name it in a sentence, and let it do your selling for you.

GO LEGIT, STEP BY STEP

Freelancer to startup: a spectrum

"Going legit" sounds like a single terrifying leap into companies, accountants and tax. It isn't. Becoming a business is a spectrum of small, reversible steps, and the useful question is never "should I register a company?" but "what is the smallest step that unlocks my next opportunity?"



WHAT IT IS

The spectrum runs from informal, cash work, through registered self-employment, a formal sole-proprietor status, a simple company, up to a full company. Each step to the right adds legitimacy, legal protection and access to clients who cannot pay someone unregistered, at the cost of a little more admin, tax and formality.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Staying fully informal quietly caps you: many clients, grants and platforms simply cannot work with someone who cannot issue an invoice. But leaping to a full company too early buries a one-person operation in accounting and obligations it does not need yet. Knowing the spectrum lets you take the smallest step that unlocks your next client, and no more.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two opposite errors: staying informal so long that you turn away real work, or forming a full company for the status when a simple registration would do. Let opportunity, not fear or vanity, decide your next step. And never treat the thresholds as fixed, always check the current local figure before you rely on it.

✎ Do this now

Mark where you are on the spectrum today, and name the one concrete opportunity that would justify the next step. If there isn't one yet, you're fine exactly where you are.

Facilitator note

Country facts change. Present the thresholds and portals as a current starting point and have participants confirm the live figure for their own country, that verification is itself a useful entrepreneurial skill.

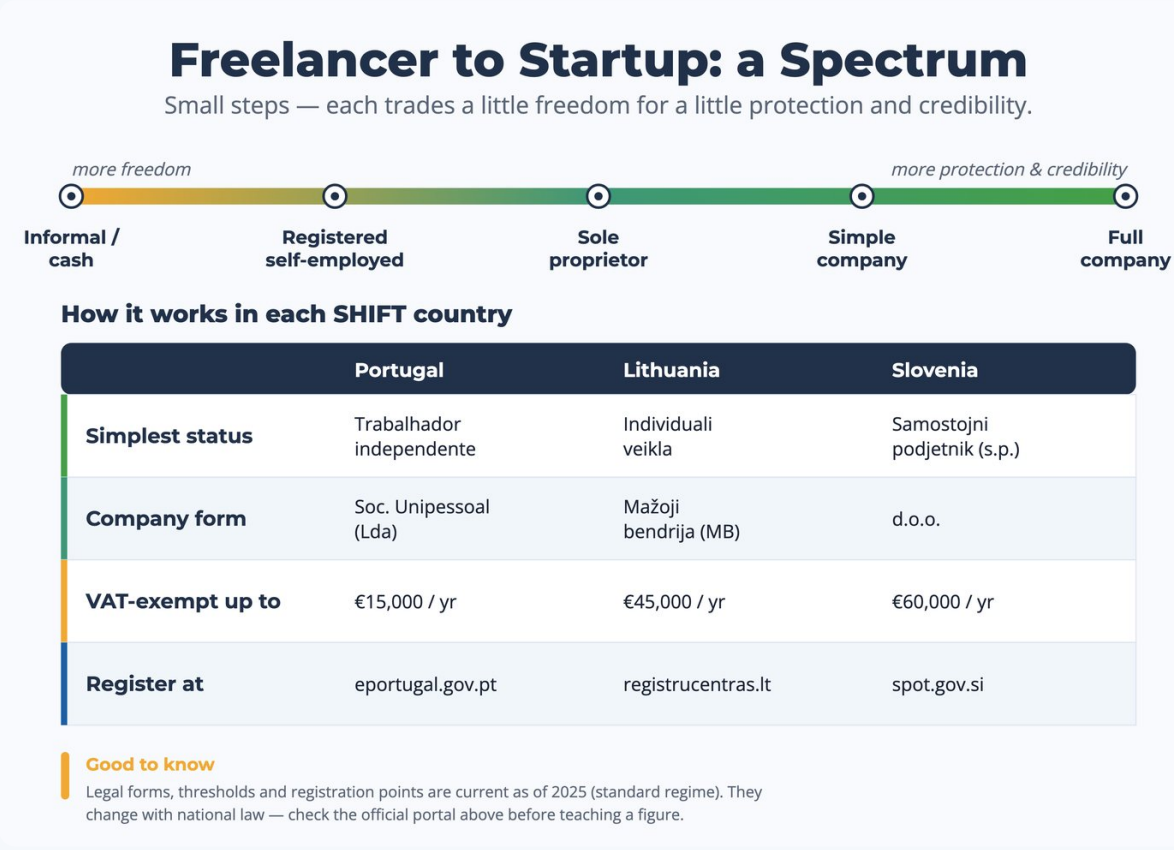
Move along the spectrum one step at a time, and only when the protection you gain is worth the freedom you trade.

GO LEGIT, STEP BY STEP

Freelancer to startup: a spectrum

HOW IT WORKS

Find where you are on the diagram, then look one step to the right. For each SHIFT country the table shows the actual status names, the income thresholds where registration or VAT begins, and the official portal to do it. Take the step when a concrete opportunity, an invoice you can't issue, a client who needs a registered supplier, makes it worth it.



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.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

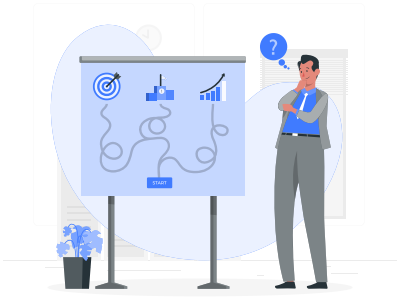
Rui works cash-in-hand until a café asks for a proper invoice. Instead of panicking or forming a company, he registers as a *trabalhador independente* in an afternoon, issues the invoice, and keeps everything else the same. One step to the right, one unlocked client, no drama.

You don't have to feel like a company to be one. Take the smallest legal step that unlocks your next client, and take the next only when the next client needs it.

TWO HONEST PATHS

Which kind of business do you want?

Almost every hard freelance decision, raise rates or take more clients, niche down or broaden, hire or stay solo, has a different right answer depending on the kind of business you're building. Most people never consciously choose, and get pulled both ways. This sub-chapter is about making that choice on purpose.



WHAT IT IS

Two archetypes. The **Niche Specialist** becomes more valuable rather than bigger: deeper expertise, higher rates, a small set of ideal clients, a business that stays intentionally small and lucrative. The **Growth Builder** adds capacity: systems, a team, or products, so the business earns even when the founder isn't personally doing the work. Neither is superior, they simply optimise for different lives.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Nearly every future decision has a different answer depending on your archetype, so choosing gives you a compass. Freelancers who never choose try to specialise and scale at the same time and do neither well: they raise rates like a Specialist but chase volume like a Builder, and burn out in the contradiction. Naming your path resolves that tension before it costs you years.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Trying to be both at once, or choosing the archetype that sounds impressive rather than the one you'd actually enjoy living. Scaling looks admirable online, but a Specialist who forces growth often ends up managing people they never wanted to manage. Choose the life, not the label.

✎ Do this now

Write one sentence: in five years, do I want to be more *valuable* or more *scalable*? Then look at your current decisions, are they pointing the same way, or pulling against each other?

Facilitator note

Let participants argue for their choice in pairs. Hearing someone defend the opposite archetype often clarifies their own, the goal is a deliberate choice, not group consensus.

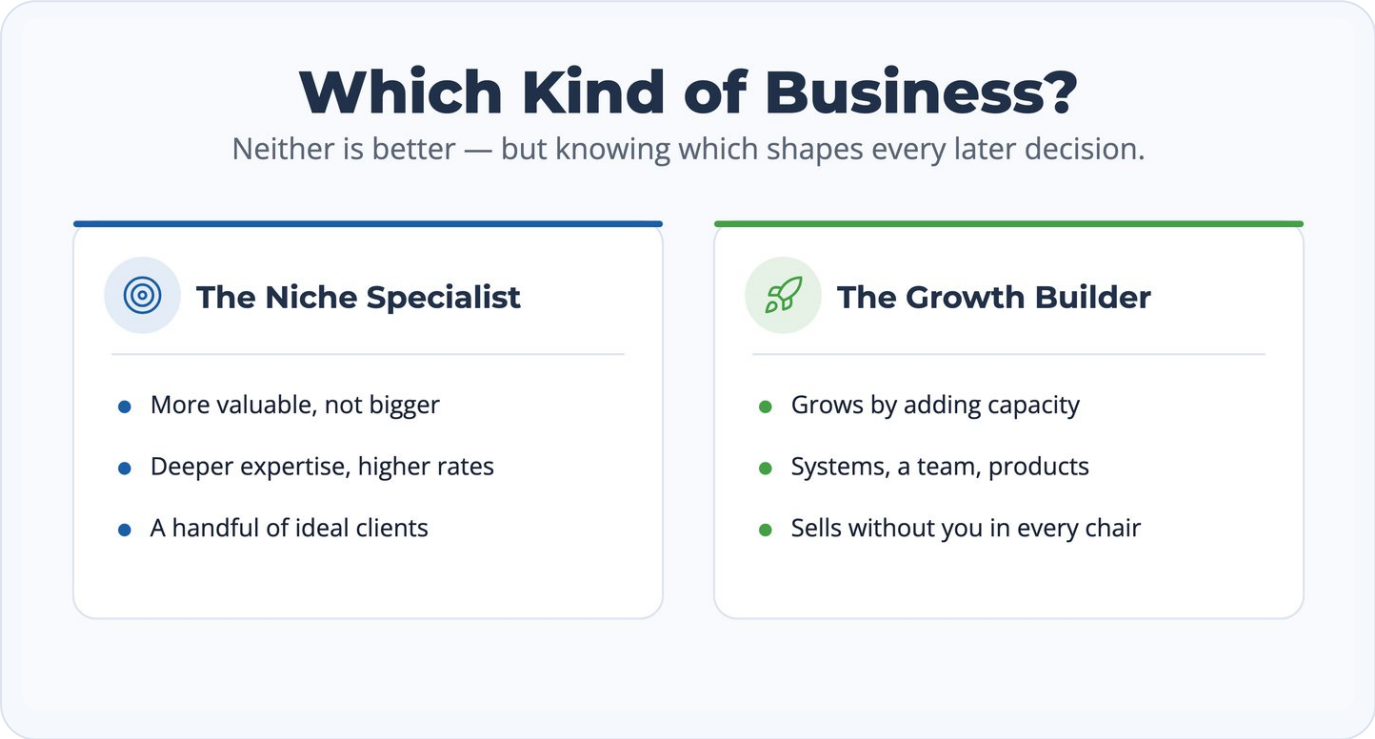
Neither archetype is better. Knowing which one you actually want turns every later decision from a guess into a choice.

TWO HONEST PATHS

Which kind of business do you want?

HOW IT WORKS

Ask what a genuinely good future looks like for you: being the sought-after expert whom others recommend, or running something that grows beyond your own hours. There is no wrong answer, but there is a wrong move, trying to be both at once. Pick the one that fits your temperament and the life you want, and let it filter every later choice.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Two designers, identical skill. Lena chooses Specialist: she raises her rate every year, keeps six clients, and never wants staff. Tomas chooses Builder: he productises his service into templates and hires a junior. Five years on both are thriving, precisely because each stopped fighting their own model.

You can be the expert or build the engine, but not both at once. Pick your path on purpose, and it makes your hardest decisions easy.

SELL A PACKAGE, NOT YOUR HOURS

Productizing your service

The fastest way to stay stuck is to sell time: your income is capped by your hours and every sale reopens a price negotiation you often lose. Productizing is the shift out of that trap, packaging the same skill into a defined offer people can understand and buy without a meeting.



WHAT IT IS

Productizing means shaping your service into a defined offer: a name, a fixed scope of exactly what's included, a fixed price, and a clear outcome. Instead of “I do design, let's talk rates,” you offer “The One-Page Website, five sections, delivered in two weeks, for one price.” The work can be similar; the way it's sold is transformed.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Hourly work has two ceilings: your income is limited by your hours, and every sale reopens a negotiation. A package breaks both. It's faster to sell (clear scope, clear price), it lets you improve and systematise the same offer again and again, and it moves the conversation from your time to the client's outcome, which is what they actually pay for.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Packaging something clients don't actually want as a package, or leaving the scope so vague it drifts back into open-ended hours. A good package has firm edges, state clearly what is *not* included, or scope creep quietly turns your fixed price back into unpaid time.

✎ Do this now

Take one thing you deliver repeatedly and write it as a package: a name, exactly what's included, one price, one outcome. Show it to a past client and ask, would you have bought that?

Facilitator note

Have participants pitch their package in a single sentence. If it takes more than a sentence to explain the scope and price, it isn't productised yet, help them cut until it fits.

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.

SELL A PACKAGE, NOT YOUR HOURS

Productizing your service

HOW IT WORKS

Look at what you already deliver repeatedly and give it a shape: name it, list precisely what's included (and what isn't), set one price, and promise one outcome. Then build a small ladder, a lighter entry offer, your core package, and a premium version, so clients self-select their level instead of haggling over yours.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

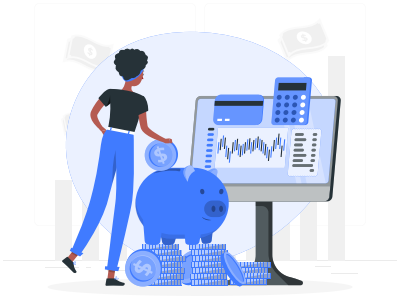
Inês edits podcasts by the hour and dreads quoting. She packages it: “Episode-Ready, edit, mix and show-notes for one episode, fixed price, three-day turnaround.” Now clients buy without a call, she batches the work, and raising the price is one number to change, not a new negotiation every time.

Stop selling your hours and start selling a result with a name and a price. It's easier for clients to buy, and far easier for you to grow.

CHOOSE HOW YOU GET PAID

Five ways a freelancer earns

Most freelancers accept how their trade “normally” gets paid and never question it. But the same skill can be sold in very different ways, and the model you choose shapes your income, your stability and your freedom. Designing that mix on purpose is one of the highest-leverage decisions in this module.



WHAT IT IS

Five common models. **Day rate**: sell blocks of your time. **Per-project**: one price for one defined outcome. **Productized package**: a fixed, repeatable offer. **Retainer**: a recurring monthly fee for ongoing access or work. **Digital product**: templates, courses or tools you make once and sell many times. Most trades can be delivered through several of these.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Your revenue model shapes your whole life, not just your income. Pure day-rate work is simple but caps you at your hours and drops to zero when you're ill or away. Retainers bring predictability but expectations. Products scale but need upfront effort with no guaranteed payoff. And relying on any single model, or single client, means one bad month becomes an emergency. Designing the mix is how you build stability.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two traps: staying on pure day-rate forever because it's familiar (and never escaping the hours), or chasing the “passive income” product before you have any steady base to fund the effort. Build the predictable streams first, then add the scalable one on top, not the other way round.

✎ Do this now

List which of the five models you use today. If it's only one, choose a second you could realistically add this quarter, and name the first small step toward it.

Facilitator note

Ask who relies on a single client or single model, that's the hidden risk in the room. Frame adding a second stream as risk reduction, not greed, it lands better and it's true.

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

CHOOSE HOW YOU GET PAID

Five ways a freelancer earns

HOW IT WORKS

Look at your skill and ask which of the five you could realistically sell it through. Then design a deliberate mix, for example a couple of retainers for a predictable base, project work on top, and one small digital product building in the background. Aim for at least two independent streams, so no single one failing sinks the month.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Pedro, a copywriter, earned only per-project, feast then famine. He redesigns it: two small monthly retainers cover his rent (a predictable base), projects add the upside, and he's slowly building a paid email-templates pack. Same skill, but now a slow project month no longer means panic.

One income stream is a single point of failure. Design a mix of two or three, and a quiet month stops being a crisis.

STAND OUT ON PURPOSE

The strategy canvas

"How do I stand out?" is usually answered with a wish, "by being better." The strategy canvas replaces the wish with a picture: it shows you and your rivals as value curves across the factors clients judge, so you can see that being different is about shape, not effort.



WHAT IT IS

The strategy canvas is a simple chart: along the bottom, the factors clients judge you on (price, speed, quality, attention, range); up the side, how much of each you offer, from low to high. You plot your value "curve" across those factors, and the typical rival's curve beside it. Where the two curves sit apart is where you're genuinely different.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Most freelancers try to stand out by being "better", but better at the same things everyone offers is just a slightly higher point on an identical curve, and a price war. The canvas shows that real differentiation comes from a different *shape*: low on some factors clients don't truly value, high on the ones they do, plus something no one else provides. It turns a slogan into a decision.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Drawing a curve that's simply "higher everywhere", that's not a strategy, it's a wish, and it usually just means a higher price with no reason. The discipline is choosing what to be deliberately *worse* at, so you can be genuinely better where it counts. Standing out always requires giving something up.

✎ Do this now

Plot your market's factors and the typical rival's curve, then mark one factor to reduce, one to raise, and one to create. That's the outline of a position only you occupy.

Facilitator note

Push participants to name a factor they'll deliberately score low on. If they won't drop anything, they haven't made a strategic choice, they've just written a longer to-do list.

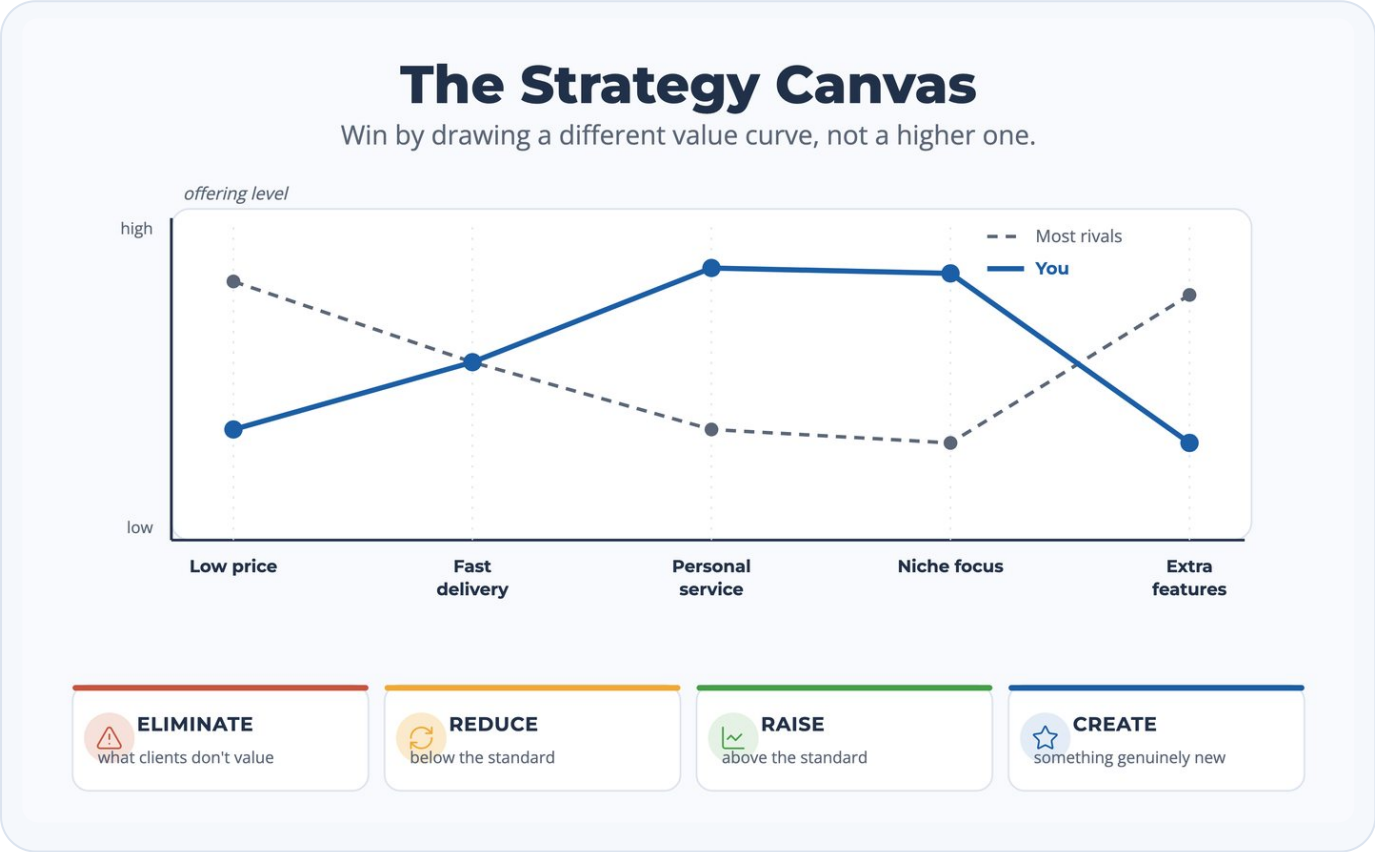
Draw your value curve against rivals. You stand out by choosing where to break away, not by trying to beat everyone at everything.

STAND OUT ON PURPOSE

The strategy canvas

HOW IT WORKS

List the five or six factors your market competes on. Plot the typical competitor's curve. Then draw yours deliberately: which factors will you **reduce** (and stop apologising for), which will you **raise** well above the norm, and what one factor will you **create** that no rival offers? Your break-away points are your positioning.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A wedding photographer surrounded by rivals all competing on “more photos, lower price” draws a different curve: fewer images but hand-finished, plus a same-week preview nobody else offers. She's not cheaper or higher-volume, she's a different shape, and she books the couples who want exactly that.

You can't stand out by being better at everything. Choose a different shape, less here, more there, one thing no one else offers, and let the curve do the arguing.

OWN THE EMPTY SPACE

The positioning map

"The market" feels vague until you draw it. A positioning map turns that vague sense into a picture of who sits where, on the two trade-offs clients actually care about, and, crucially, where no one sits. It's how a niche becomes visible to the people looking for it.



WHAT IT IS

A positioning map is a two-axis chart. Pick two things clients genuinely trade off, price versus quality, speed versus craft, generalist versus specialist, and put one on each axis. Plot yourself and your rivals as dots. The map turns a fuzzy feeling about the competition into a clear view of the crowded corners and the open spaces.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Competing head-on in a crowded corner means competing on price, because clients can't tell you apart. A clear, differentiated position, ideally in space rivals have left empty, makes you the obvious choice for the clients who want exactly that, and lets you charge for the difference. Positioning is what makes your niche findable.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Picking axes that don't matter to clients (so the map looks tidy but means nothing), or claiming an empty space that's empty because there's no demand. A gap is only an opportunity if paying clients are already standing in it, wishing someone would serve them.

✎ Do this now

Draw your market on two client-relevant axes, plot the main players, and mark one empty space. Then name three real clients who'd want what sits there, if you can't, choose a different gap.

Facilitator note

Debate the axes first, half the value is arguing about what clients actually trade off. A map with the wrong axes will lead the room confidently in the wrong direction.

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

OWN THE EMPTY SPACE

The positioning map

HOW IT WORKS

Choose two axes that reflect real client trade-offs in your market. Plot the main players honestly. Look for a gap, then apply the test that separates a strategy from a fantasy: is there a group of clients who actively want what lives in that empty space, and can pay for it? If yes, that's your position. If no, it's empty for a reason.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

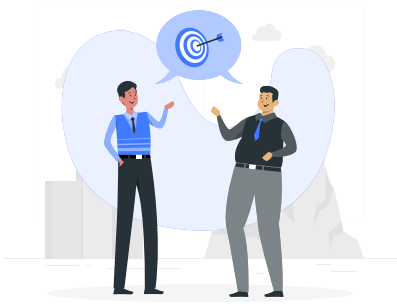
In a town full of “cheap and fast” web designers, Nuno maps the market and spots an empty corner: “premium, but small-business-friendly.” Local shop owners want better than the cheap option but fear agency prices, real demand, no supplier. He positions there and quietly owns it.

Don't fight for a crowded corner. Find the space clients want and rivals have left empty, and become the obvious choice there.

FIT YOUR OFFER TO THEIR WORLD

The value proposition canvas

The most common reason a freelance offer fails isn't weak skill, it's building something the maker finds interesting that solves no pain the client actually feels. The value proposition canvas forces the opposite order: understand their world first, then design an offer that answers it.



WHAT IT IS

The canvas has two halves. The **client profile**: the jobs they're trying to get done, the pains that frustrate them along the way, and the gains they hope for. Your **value map**: your products and services, the pain relievers they provide, and the gain creators they deliver. The whole tool exists to line the two halves up.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Designing from your features outward, “here's what I can do,” leaves you forever convincing people they should care. Designing from their world inward, “here's the pain I remove,” means the offer sells itself, because it names something the client already feels. The canvas simply forces that order, which is where most offers go right or wrong.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Filling in your own side first and then bending the client's world to fit it. The entire point is to start from their jobs, pains and gains honestly, including the ones your offer doesn't yet address. Fit you invent isn't fit; it's wishful thinking with a nice diagram.

✎ Do this now

Pick one real client. Fill only the client side, jobs, pains, gains. Then hold your current offer against it and mark the one pain or gain you speak to least. That's your next improvement.

Facilitator note

Have participants fill the client side for a real person they know, not an imagined “average” client. Averages have no pains; real people do, and that's exactly where fit is found.

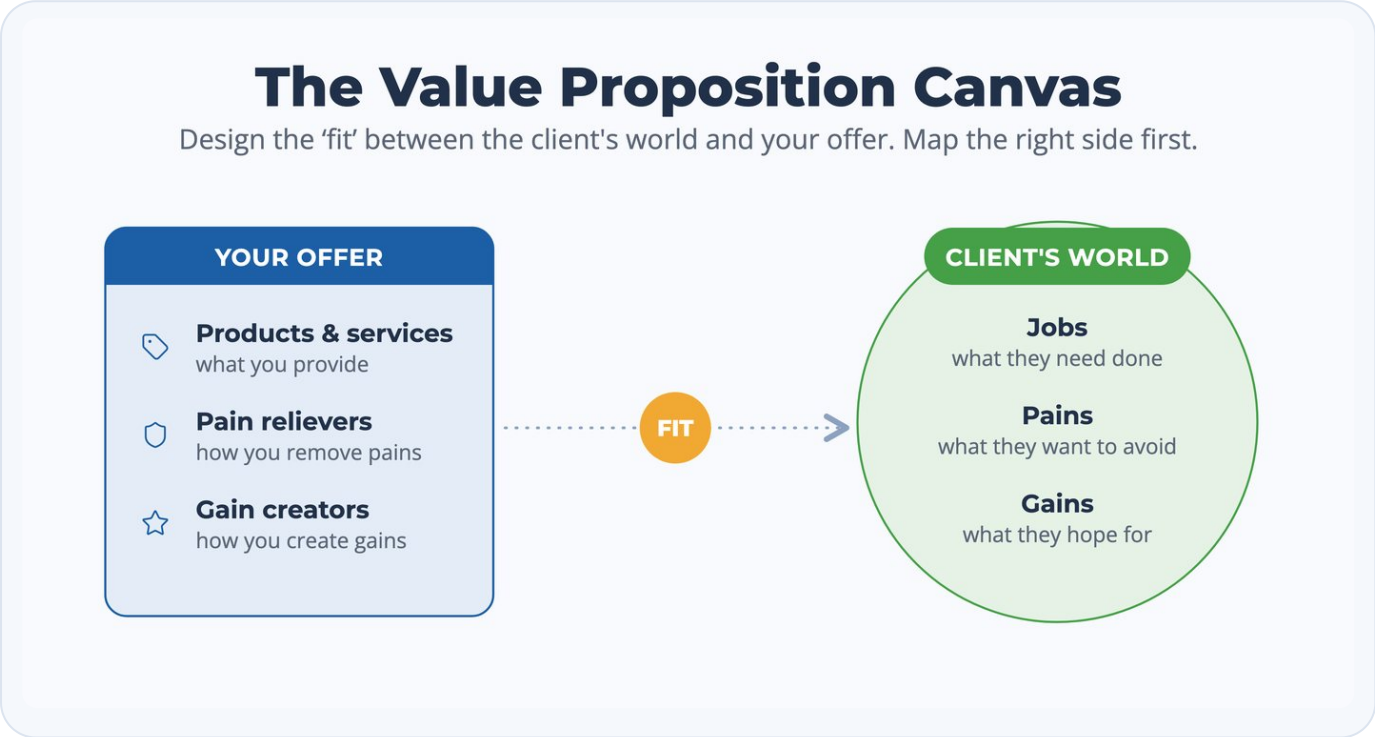
Map the client's jobs, pains and gains first, then shape your offer to fit them. Fit is what people actually pay for.

FIT YOUR OFFER TO THEIR WORLD

The value proposition canvas

HOW IT WORKS

Fill the client side first: pick one real client, list the job they're doing, the pains along the way, and the gains they want. Then, and only then, map your offer against it, which pains do you relieve, which gains do you create? Cross out any feature that matches nothing on their side; it's effort they won't pay for.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A bookkeeper lists her features, "monthly reports, reconciliations, tidy spreadsheets." Then she maps the client and sees it: the real pain is *fear of a tax mistake*, the real gain is *peace of mind*. She re-frames her whole offer around exactly that, and stops competing on spreadsheet features nobody was losing sleep over.

Don't build an offer and hope it fits. Map their jobs, pains and gains first, then shape your offer to answer them, that alignment is the whole game.

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)

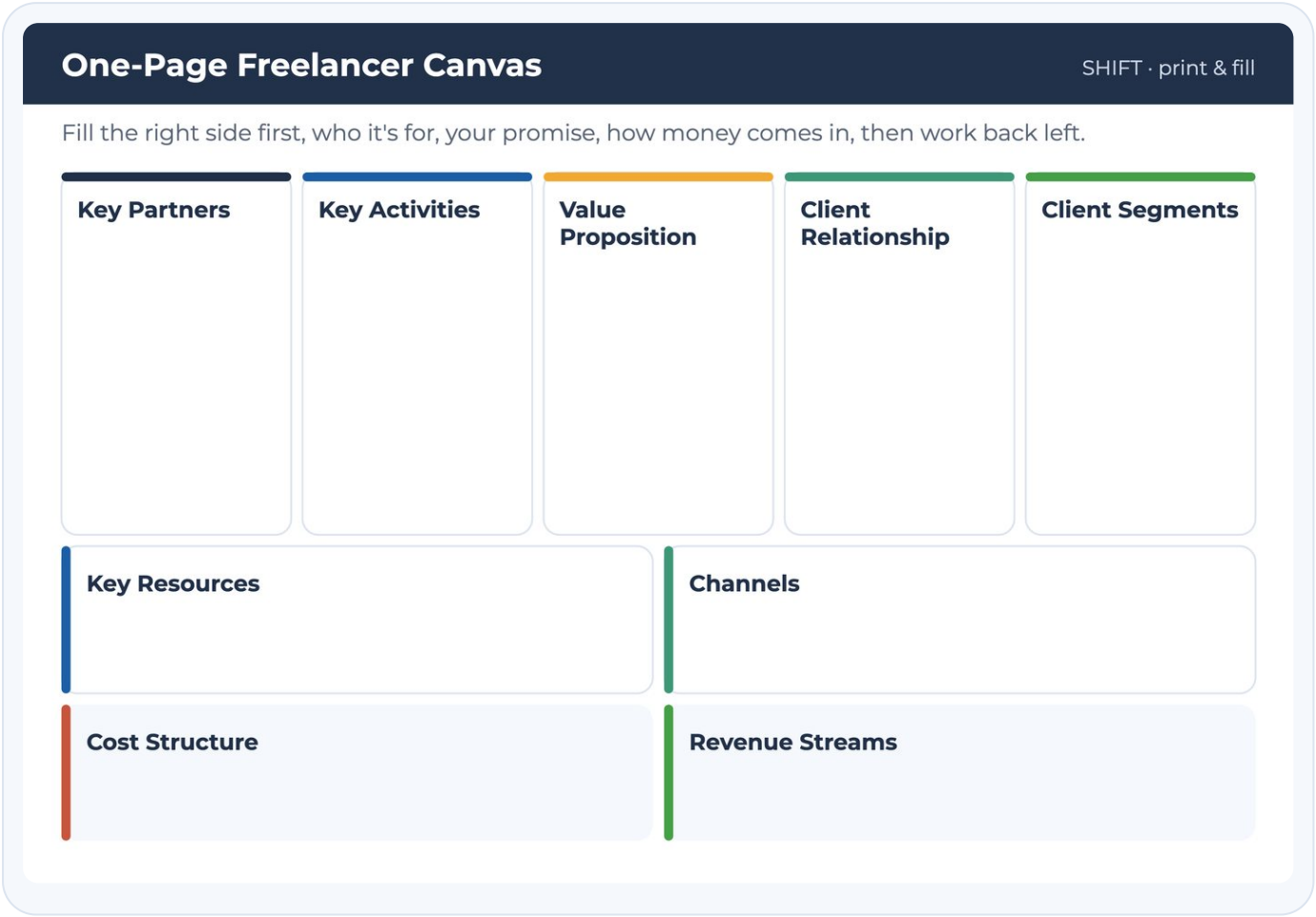
For the facilitator

- 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.

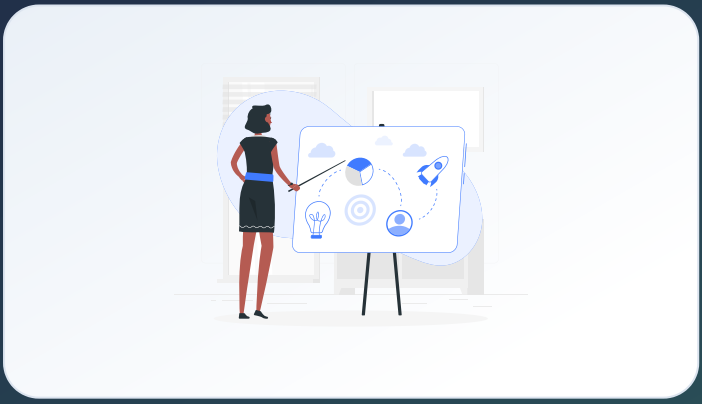
Clients don't buy what you make, they buy the removal of a problem. Name it in one clear sentence.

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.





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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

Most freelancers build first and hope, pouring weeks into a service, a site or an offer before anyone confirms it's wanted. The Build–Measure–Learn loop flips that: it treats every idea as a testable guess and gives you the fastest way to find out if you're right, before you've spent your savings finding out you're not.



WHAT IT IS

The loop has three steps. **Build** the smallest thing that can test one specific assumption. **Measure** what real people actually do with it, not what they say they'd do. **Learn** from that evidence and decide whether to persevere, tweak, or pivot. Then go round again. The unit of progress isn't features shipped, it's assumptions tested.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Time and money are a freelancer's scarcest resources, and building the wrong thing burns both. The loop is how you fail cheaply and early instead of expensively and late. Each lap converts a risky guess ("people will pay for this") into evidence, so by the time you invest properly, you're building on facts, not hope. The faster you loop, the faster you learn what's true.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Building too much before measuring, so the "test" is really a launch, and treating opinions as evidence. "That's a great idea, I'd totally use it" costs someone nothing to say. Measure behaviour, a deposit, a sign-up, a click, not enthusiasm. And test one assumption at a time, or you won't know what the result actually proved.

✎ Do this now

Name the one assumption that would kill your idea if it's false. Then design the smallest test you could run this week to find out, and put a date on it.

Facilitator note

Push participants to state their riskiest assumption as a sentence that could be proven false. If it can't be wrong, it can't be tested, help them make it specific and falsifiable.

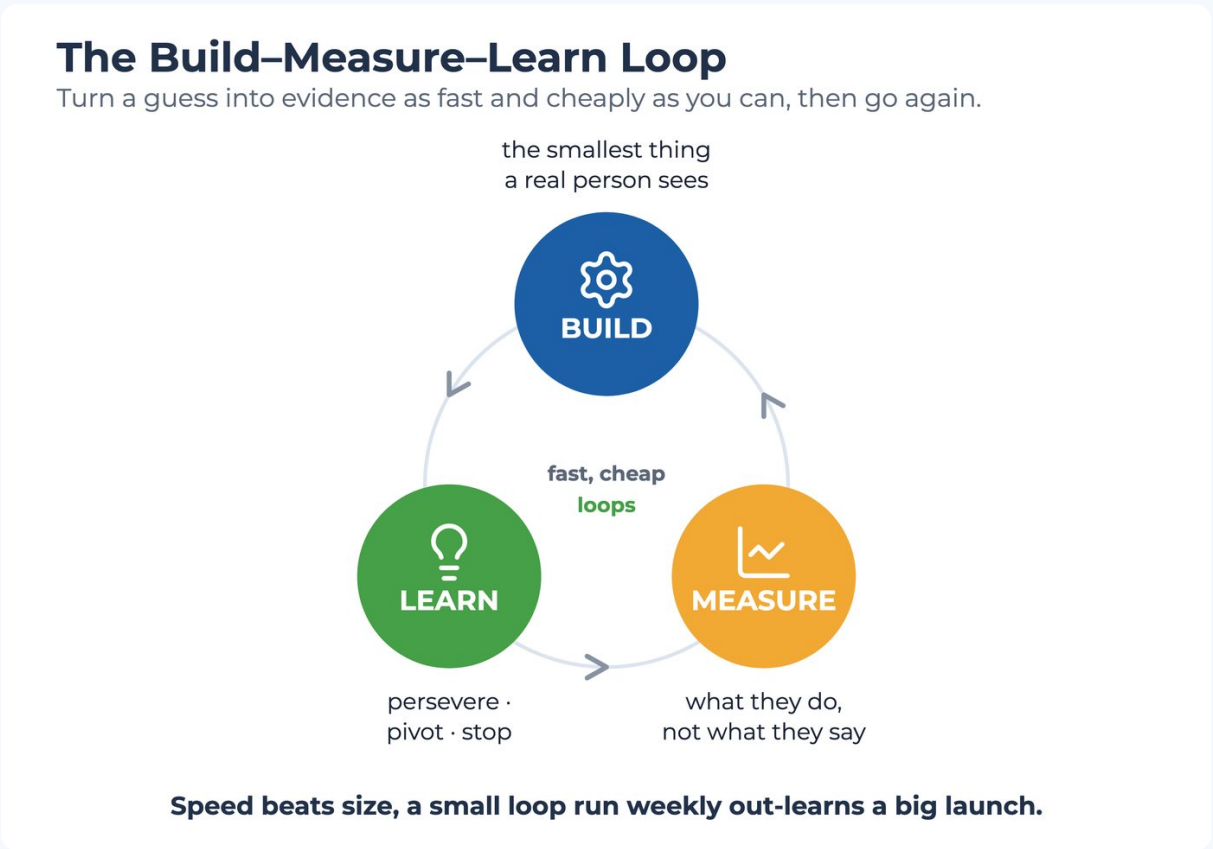
Turn your best guess into evidence, cheaply and fast, then let the evidence decide your next move.

THE ENGINE

The Build–Measure–Learn loop

HOW IT WORKS

Pick your single riskiest assumption, the one that sinks the whole idea if it's wrong. Build the smallest possible test of just that, a message, a mock-up, a pre-sale. Put it in front of real people and watch what they do. Then decide: does the evidence say keep going, adjust, or change direction? Resist adding anything the test doesn't need.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Léa wants to launch a meal-prep service. Instead of renting a kitchen, she loops: she posts one photo and a price in a local group (build), counts how many actually pay a deposit, not just “like” (measure), and learns people want it, but on Sundays, not weekdays (learn). One weekend, real evidence, no kitchen rented.

Don't build and hope. Build the smallest test, measure what people do, learn, and loop again, fast. Speed of learning is the real competitive advantage.

TWO MODES

Search before you scale

The most expensive freelance mistakes come from doing the right thing at the wrong time, specifically, scaling a business you haven't yet proven. Customer Development names two distinct modes, search and execution, and its core rule is simple: don't switch from one to the other until the evidence says you've earned it.



WHAT IT IS

Every venture starts in **search**: you don't yet know who exactly wants this, what they'll pay, or how to reach them, so the job is to find out through cheap experiments, conversations and pivots. Once you have real evidence, paying customers, a repeatable way to reach them, you shift to **execution**: doubling down, systematising, and scaling what works. They are genuinely different jobs with different rules.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Searching and executing reward opposite behaviours. Search rewards curiosity, cheap tests and changing your mind; execution rewards focus, consistency and commitment. Scale, hire, spend on ads, commit to stock, while you're still searching, and you lock in a guess before you know it's right, the classic way freelancers burn their savings. Knowing your mode tells you whether to experiment or to commit.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Scaling too early, quitting your job, building the full product, spending on ads, before you have proof, and, less obviously, staying in search mode forever because committing is scary. Both are failures of timing. Let evidence, not fear or excitement, tell you when to switch modes.

✎ Do this now

Decide which mode you're actually in today. If you're searching, list the next three cheap experiments. If you're executing, name the one thing that's working and how you'll do more of it.

Facilitator note

Have participants declare their mode and defend it with evidence. Most who claim to be “executing” are still searching, that realisation, made safely in the room, saves real money.

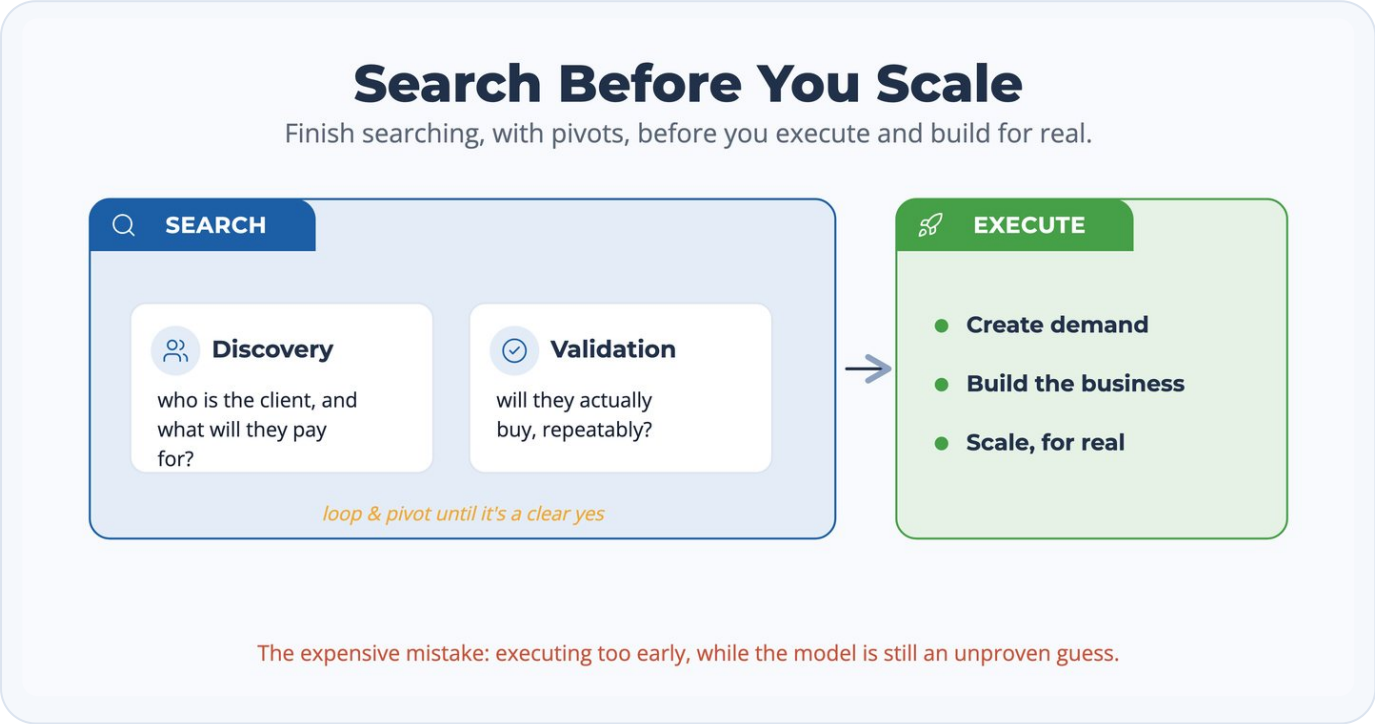
Finish searching, with pivots and dead ends, before you execute. Never pour fuel on a guess.

TWO MODES

Search before you scale

HOW IT WORKS

Ask honestly: do I have evidence that a specific group will pay for this, and a repeatable way to reach them? If not, you're in **search**, so keep experiments small, cheap and reversible, and expect pivots. If yes, you're ready to **execute**, so stop second-guessing and pour your energy into scaling what works. Don't spend like you're executing while you're still searching.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Tiago wants to sell a fitness app. In search mode he runs a €0 test: a free WhatsApp group and a simple plan. Only when fifteen people ask to pay does he know he's found something, then he switches to execution and builds the app. Had he built first, he'd have scaled a guess.

Search and scale are different jobs. Stay in search, messy and cheap, until the evidence is undeniable, then commit fully to execution. Getting the order right is half the battle.

START SMALL

The smallest version worth testing

"Minimum Viable Product" is the most misused phrase in this module. It doesn't mean a rough, buggy version of your grand plan. It means the smallest experiment that answers one question: will real people take a real action that proves they want this? Get it right and you save months; get it wrong and you build a beautiful thing nobody asked for.



WHAT IT IS

An MVP is the least you can make or do to test your riskiest assumption with real people. For a freelancer it's usually not software at all: a one-page site with a "buy" button, a manual, done-by-hand version of the service, a single pre-order. It's **viable** (it delivers just enough value to test the response) and **minimum** (it contains nothing that doesn't serve the test).

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Building the full thing first is a bet you can't afford: you spend your scarcest resources before you know anyone wants it. The MVP inverts the risk, tiny investment, real answer. It also teaches you what to build: how people react to the smallest version reveals what actually matters to them, so if you do build more, you build the right things. Learning, not launching, is the point.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Building a "minimum" version that's still far too big, or one so stripped-back it delivers no real value and tests nothing. The MVP must be genuinely small *and* valuable enough that a real response means something. And "people said they liked it" is not a pass, only real action, paying, signing up, showing up, counts.

✎ Do this now

Describe your idea, then design the smallest version you could put in front of real people this week, ideally done by hand. Name the single action that would prove they want it.

Facilitator note

Challenge every "MVP" that still takes weeks to build. Ask: what could you test by Friday, with no code? The best MVPs in the room are usually a conversation, a page, or a pre-sale.

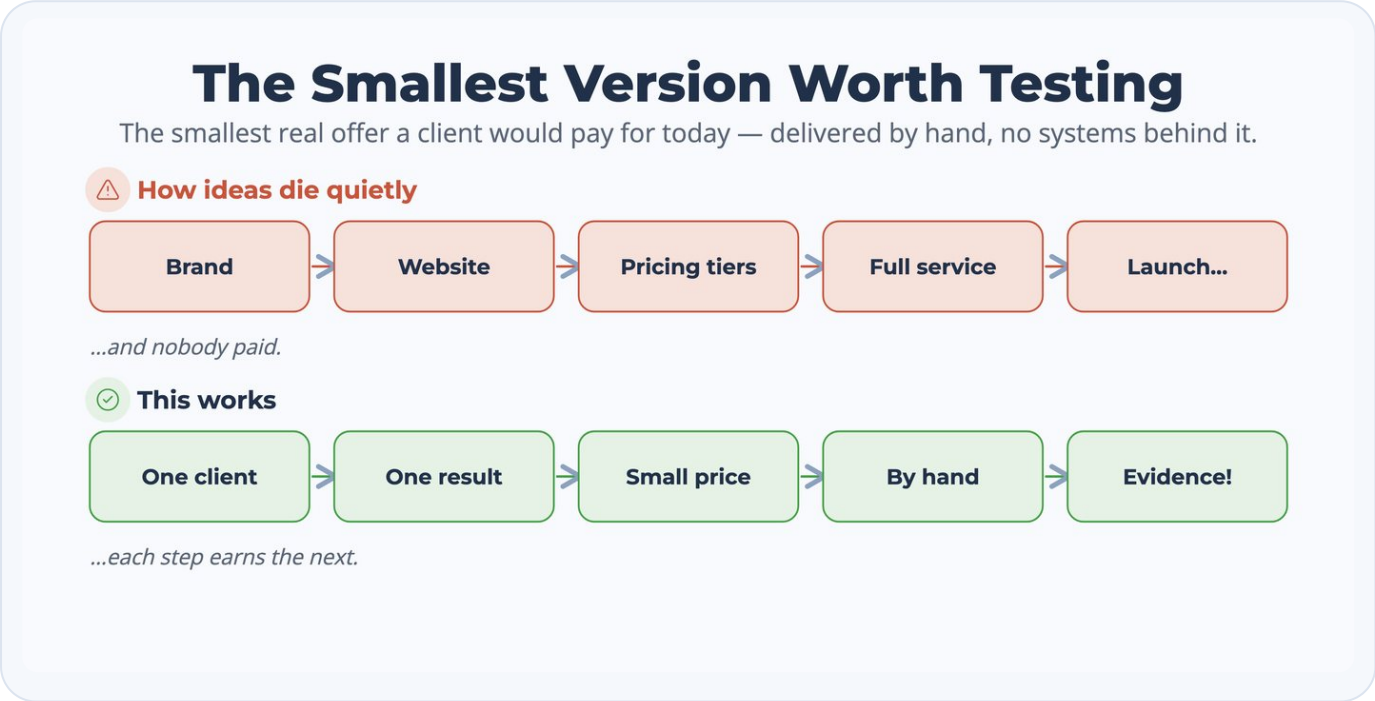
Don't build the whole studio. Sell one real result, to one real client, by hand, today.

START SMALL

The smallest version worth testing

HOW IT WORKS

Write down the value you claim to offer and the one assumption you're least sure of. Design the smallest way to test it with real behaviour, and strip out everything else. Prefer manual over automated, a page over a product, a pre-sale over a build. Put it in front of real people and measure what they do.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Marta dreams of an online course. Her MVP isn't a course, it's a single live workshop she sells to ten people for a small fee. If they pay and love it, she's proven demand and learned which lessons matter, then she records the course. If they don't, she's out one afternoon, not three months.

Don't build the whole thing and hope. Build the smallest test of the one thing that matters, deliver it by hand if you can, and let real behaviour tell you what to do next.

THE HIGHEST-RETURN HABIT

Customer discovery, then iterate

You cannot think your way to what customers want, you have to ask them, carefully. Customer discovery is the disciplined habit of learning about your customers' real problems before, and while, you build. Done well it's the highest-return activity a freelancer can do; done badly, as a disguised sales pitch, it produces flattering lies that lead you off a cliff.



WHAT IT IS

Customer discovery is a small number of honest, structured conversations with the people you hope to serve, aimed at understanding their world: the job they're trying to do, the problems in their way, what they've already tried, and what those problems cost them. It is emphatically *not* a pitch. You're a curious researcher, not a salesperson, the goal is truth, not a yes.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Guessing what customers want is the single biggest cause of wasted effort. Discovery replaces guessing with evidence for almost no money, an hour of conversations can save months of building the wrong thing. It also hands you the exact words your customers use, which later become the most persuasive words in your marketing. Everything downstream, the offer, the price, the pitch, gets easier when it's built on what people actually said.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Turning the conversation into a pitch ("so, would you use something like this?"), which trains people to be polite instead of honest. Also asking about the future ("would you pay for X?") instead of the past ("what did you do last time, and what did it cost?"). People are unreliable about hypotheticals but honest about history, mine the history.

✎ Do this now

List three real people who fit your target customer. Message one today and ask for fifteen minutes to hear about their experience with the problem, no pitch. Then just listen and take notes.

Facilitator note

Role-play a bad interview (all pitch) and a good one (all curiosity) so the difference is obvious. Then have participants draft three past-focused questions and test them on each other before going to real people.

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

THE HIGHEST-RETURN HABIT

Customer discovery, then iterate

HOW IT WORKS

Pick a handful of real people who fit your target. Ask about their **past and present**, not your future product: "Tell me about the last time you dealt with X." "What did you try? What did it cost you?" Listen far more than you talk, and never describe your idea until the end, if at all. Look especially for problems people have already paid, in time or money, to solve.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

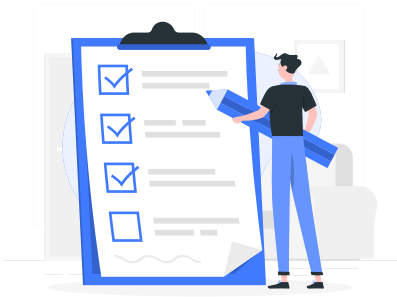
Before building a booking tool for hairdressers, Ivan interviews eight of them. He never mentions his app. He just asks how they handle appointments now, and discovers their real pain isn't booking, it's no-shows. He'd have built the wrong product; instead he builds a deposit feature they immediately want.

The cheapest, most valuable thing you can do is ask, about their problem, not your idea, and listen. A few honest conversations will out-teach months of clever guessing.

CLIMB THE PROOF LADDER

The validation ladder

People say “we validated it” to mean anything from “my friends liked the idea” to “forty strangers pre-paid.” Those are wildly different levels of certainty. The validation ladder makes the difference explicit: each rung is a stronger form of proof, and the discipline is to climb high enough, before you bet, that the evidence actually justifies the risk you're taking.



WHAT IT IS

The ladder runs from weak to strong signals. Near the bottom: attention and opinions, likes, “great idea”, a click. In the middle: small commitments, an email address, time booked, a waitlist spot. Near the top: real money and repetition, a pre-payment, a purchase, a repeat purchase, a referral. Each rung costs the customer more, and is therefore worth more as evidence.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Not all evidence is equal, and treating a low rung as a high one is how people confidently launch things nobody buys. Likes and encouragement are nearly free to give, so they prove almost nothing; parting with money is costly, so it proves a lot. The ladder lets you calibrate: it tells you how strong your evidence really is, and whether it's strong enough for the size of the leap you're about to take.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Confusing a low rung for a high one, treating likes, encouragement or “I'd definitely buy that” as proof, then committing real money on the strength of it. The opposite error exists too: demanding top-rung proof for a trivial, cheap experiment. Match the rung to the risk, no higher, no lower.

✎ Do this now

Write down your next big decision and what it risks. Then name the highest rung of proof you currently have, and design one test to climb at least one rung higher before you commit.

Facilitator note

Have participants place their current evidence on the ladder honestly, most sit lower than they think. Then set each a “one rung higher” challenge: turn a like into a sign-up, a sign-up into a pre-sale.

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.

CLIMB THE PROOF LADDER

The validation ladder

HOW IT WORKS

Name the decision you're about to make and how much it risks. Then ask which rung of proof it deserves, and design a test to reach it. Chasing a bigger bet? Don't settle for sign-ups; ask for a pre-payment. The key move is always to push people one rung higher, from saying to doing, from doing to paying, because each step up sharply increases how much you can trust the result.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Sara has 300 likes on her craft-kit idea, exciting, but low on the ladder. Before ordering stock she climbs: she opens pre-orders. Only twelve of the 300 actually pay. That gap, likes versus payments, saves her from buying inventory for 300 customers she didn't have. She adjusts and starts small.

Not all evidence is equal. Climb from words to actions to money, and only bet as big as your rung on the ladder allows.

REACH PEOPLE ANYWHERE

Reaching people, city or not

A quiet assumption runs through a lot of business advice: that you're in a city, with a network and a scene. Millions of young freelancers aren't, and that's fine. Reaching customers isn't about where you live; it's about choosing channels that fit your customers and your context, and today those range from the community hall down the road to a global platform on your phone.



WHAT IT IS

A channel is simply how you reach and are found by customers. They fall into two families. **Local and human**: word of mouth, community and religious groups, local markets, noticeboards, partnerships with nearby businesses, family and neighbour networks. **Online and borderless**: marketplaces, social platforms, freelance sites, local buy-and-sell groups, that let you serve clients regardless of distance. Most freelancers do best with a small mix of both.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Choosing the wrong channel wastes effort on people who'll never buy, while the right one puts you in front of ready customers cheaply. For freelancers outside major cities this matters doubly: local channels turn a small, trusted community into reliable early clients, and online channels remove the geographic ceiling entirely. You don't need everyone, you need to be reliably visible to the specific people who want what you do.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Copying the channels of famous founders, big-city networking, paid ads, a huge following, that don't fit your customers or context, and ignoring the humble local channels that actually work. Also spreading across every platform at once, better to own one or two channels your customers really use than to be faintly present everywhere.

✎ Do this now

Name where your ideal customers already gather, one local place and one online. Commit to showing up in just those two, consistently, for the next month, and ignore the rest.

Facilitator note

Map the room's channels on a local–online line. Participants outside cities often undervalue their local, trust-based channels, surface those, and pair each person with one realistic online channel too.

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

REACH PEOPLE ANYWHERE

Reaching people, city or not

HOW IT WORKS

Start from your customer, not the channel: where do they already spend time, ask for recommendations, and look for services like yours? Pick one or two channels that match, one local, one online is a strong start, and show up there consistently rather than spreading yourself thin everywhere. Lean on trust: in smaller communities a personal recommendation outperforms any advert.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

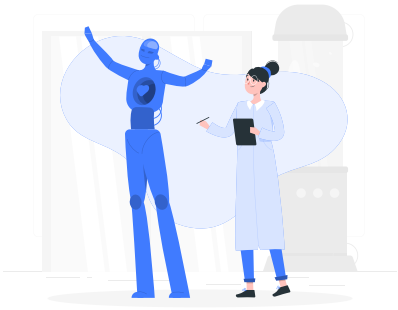
Nadia runs a tailoring service in a small town. She skips glossy ads and uses two channels: the local women's WhatsApp group (word of mouth, trusted) and a national marketplace app (distance-free). The first fills her week locally; the second brings custom orders from cities she's never visited.

You don't need a city or a crowd, you need the two or three channels your specific customers already use. Choose those, show up consistently, and let distance stop being an excuse.

YOUR UNFAIR HELPER

Where AI actually helps a freelancer

AI is neither magic nor a threat to fear, for a freelancer it's a fast, tireless assistant that's brilliant at starting things and terrible at being trusted. Used well it removes the two biggest drags on a one-person business: the blank page and the endless admin. Used badly, it fills your work with confident nonsense and quietly leaks your clients' data. The skill is knowing exactly which jobs to hand it.



WHAT IT IS

For a freelancer, AI is genuinely useful at four jobs. **Draft**: first versions of proposals, posts, replies, outlines, ideas to react to. **Summarise**: turn a long document, thread or call into the key points. **Research**: gather, compare and organise information to a starting point. **Automate**: handle repetitive admin, tidy notes, reformat, sort. In all four it produces a *starting point*, never a finished, trusted result.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

The blank page and the admin pile are where solo freelancers lose hours and momentum. AI collapses both: a draft in seconds beats a morning staring at nothing, and automated busywork frees you for the work only you can do. But its fluency is a trap, it states wrong things as confidently as right ones, so its value is entirely in *speed*, never in *trust*. It multiplies your output only if you keep the judgement.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two dangerous habits. Publishing AI output unread, so its confident errors become your mistakes and its blandness becomes your voice. And pasting confidential client material, contracts, personal data, into tools you don't control. Treat AI as a junior assistant whose work you always check and own, never as an authority.

✎ Do this now

Pick one recurring task that eats your time, drafting replies, summarising briefs, tidying notes, and try AI on just that this week. Judge the result honestly, and keep it only if you'd sign your name to it.

Facilitator note

Have participants try one real task with and without AI and compare. The lesson lands on its own: faster start, but useless until a human checks, cuts and rewrites it. Reinforce the two hard rules on facts and privacy.

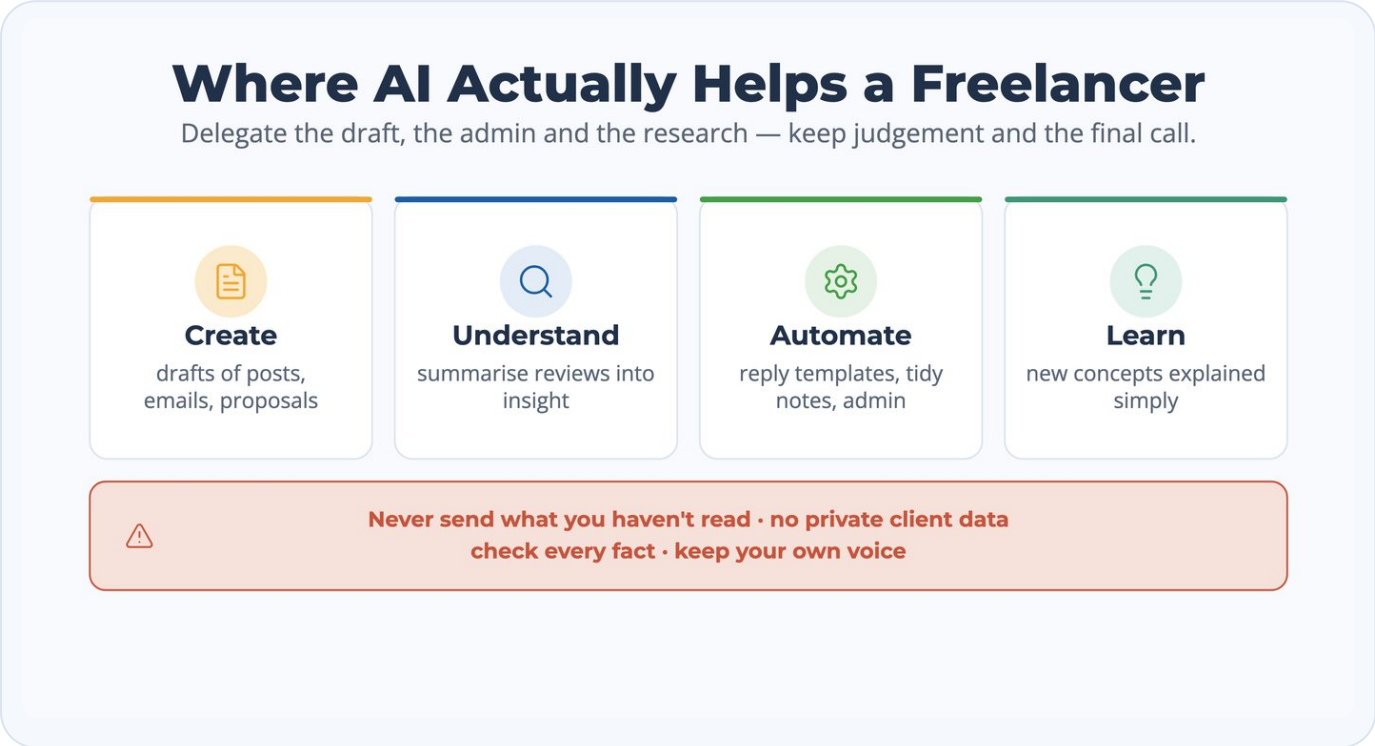
Let AI take the first draft and the admin, you keep judgement, taste and the final decision.

YOUR UNFAIR HELPER

Where AI actually helps a freelancer

HOW IT WORKS

Give it a clear instruction, who it's for, the goal, the tone, the format, and let it produce options fast. Then do the part it can't: check every fact, cut what's generic, and rewrite it in your own voice until it sounds like you, not a machine. Reach for it on the four jobs above; keep it away from anything needing real judgement, taste, or confidential client information.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Bruno, a freelance marketer, uses AI to draft ten subject-line options in seconds (draft), condense a client's twenty-page brief into one page (summarise), and list competitors to check (research). He then chooses, verifies and rewrites everything himself. He's twice as fast, and still unmistakably him.

AI removes the blank page and the busywork, not the thinking. Let it draft, summarise, research and automate, then check it, own it, and keep the judgement for yourself.

FIND THE LEAK

The growth funnel

Freelancers usually think about growth as “I need more clients”, so they chase more attention. But attention is only the top of a five-stage funnel, and if a lower stage leaks, more attention just drains out faster. The AARRR funnel (sometimes called “pirate metrics”) shows you the whole journey, so you can spot where you're actually losing people and fix the stage that matters.



WHAT IT IS

Five stages, top to bottom. **Acquisition**: people discover you. **Activation**: they have a first good experience. **Retention**: they come back. **Referral**: they tell others. **Revenue**: they pay, and pay again. Every stage leaks, only some of the people at one stage reach the next, and the shape of your leaks tells you exactly where your growth is stuck.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Treating growth as a single number (“more clients”) hides where the real problem is. One freelancer's bottleneck is that nobody finds them (acquisition); another's is that people try them once and never return (retention). The same effort, more marketing, helps the first and completely wastes the second. Seeing the funnel lets you diagnose instead of guess, and put your limited energy where it actually moves the needle.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Optimising the wrong stage, usually pouring effort into getting more attention when the real leak is further down (people try you once and vanish, or never refer). Also ignoring retention and referral entirely, chasing new clients while quietly losing the ones you have. Diagnose first; the loudest stage is rarely the leakiest.

✎ Do this now

Draw your five funnel stages and estimate the numbers. Circle the single biggest drop-off, that's your bottleneck, and name one change to fix it this month, before you chase any new leads.

Facilitator note

Have participants guess their leakiest stage, then estimate the numbers, the two often disagree. The gap between assumed and actual bottleneck is the insight; direct their next effort at the real one.

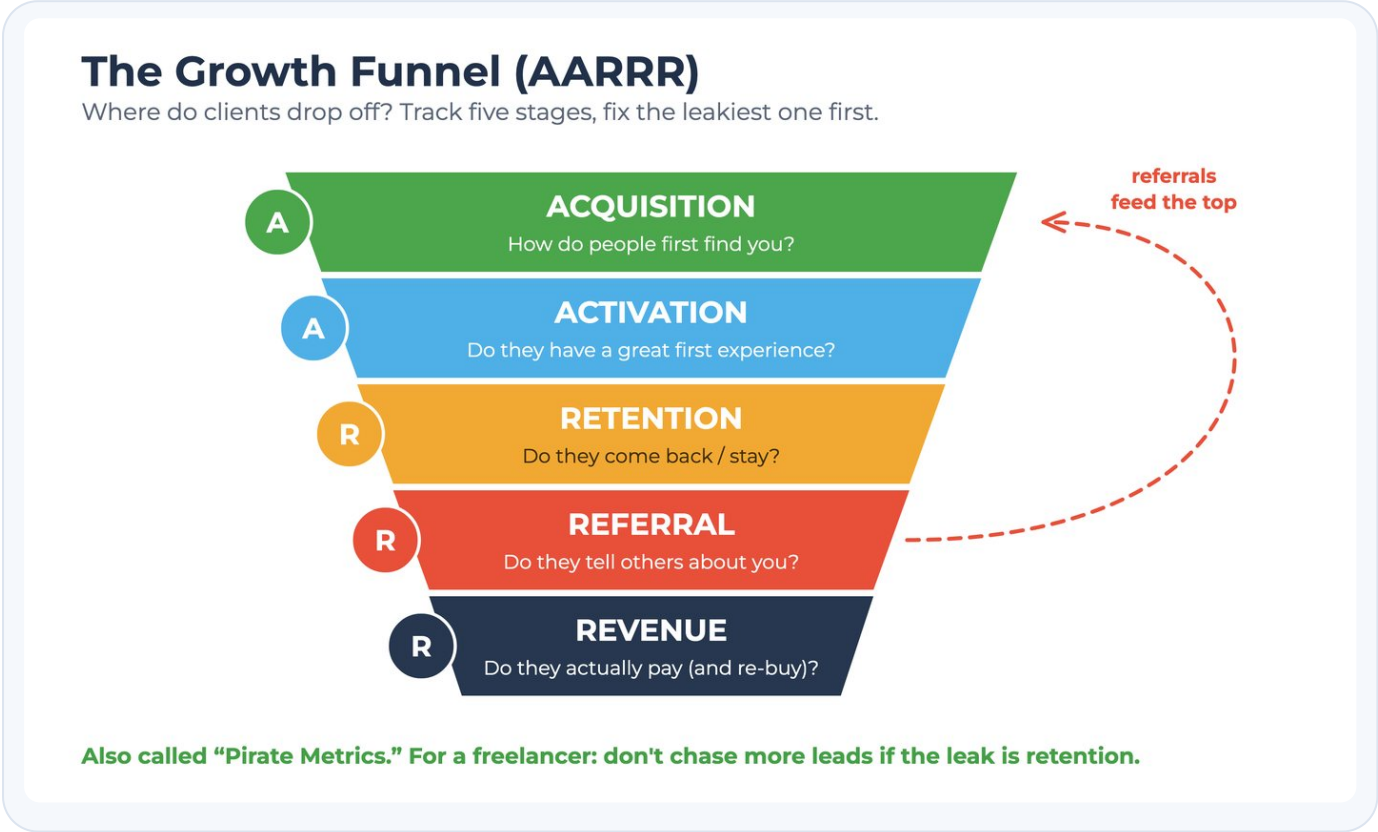
Don't chase more leads, find the leakiest stage of your funnel and fix that one first.

FIND THE LEAK

The growth funnel

HOW IT WORKS

Sketch your five stages and put a rough number on each, out of everyone who finds you, how many try, return, refer, pay? The stage with the biggest drop-off is your bottleneck. Fix that one before anything else. And remember the loop: delighting customers so they refer others quietly refills the top of the funnel, often the cheapest growth there is.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Ana gets plenty of enquiries (strong acquisition) but few become clients, a big leak at activation. More marketing would be wasted. She fixes the leak instead: a clearer first reply and a simple starter offer. Same number of enquiries, twice the clients, because she fixed the stage that was actually broken.

Growth isn't more leads, it's a less leaky funnel. Find the stage that loses the most people, fix that one, and let happy customers refill the top.

SHIP SMALL, SHIP OFTEN

Work in small cycles

Perfectionism is a freelancer's quiet killer: you wait until it's “ready”, and “ready” never comes, so nothing ships and nothing is learned. Working in short, agile cycles is the antidote. Instead of one long march to a big launch, you take small, repeated loops, each ending in something real, so progress and learning happen continuously, not all-or-nothing at the end.



WHAT IT IS

An agile cycle is a short, repeating loop: **plan** a small next step, **do** it, **review** what happened and what you learned, then **adjust** and go again. Each loop is short (days or a week, not months) and ends with something concrete, delivered, shown, or tested. The rhythm matters more than the size of any single step; you're trading one big bet for many small, correctable ones.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Long, hidden projects accumulate risk: you can be wrong for months without knowing it, and by the time you reveal the work, correcting course is expensive. Short cycles surface reality early and often, every loop is a chance to catch a wrong turn cheaply. For a solo freelancer juggling client work, they also make big goals manageable: a scary project becomes a series of small, finishable steps, each with visible progress that keeps you moving.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Planning everything in detail before starting (and never starting), or running cycles so long they're just mini-waterfalls that hide problems for weeks. The other trap is skipping the *review*, doing lots but never pausing to learn, so you move fast in possibly the wrong direction. The learning step is what makes it agile, not just busy.

✎ Do this now

Take one stalled project and slice off the smallest piece you can finish and show this week. Plan only that, do it, and book a fifteen-minute review with yourself for Friday to decide the next loop.

Facilitator note

Have each participant define a one-week cycle for a real goal, then commit to a review point. Emphasise ending every cycle with something visible, that's what turns motion into progress and feedback.

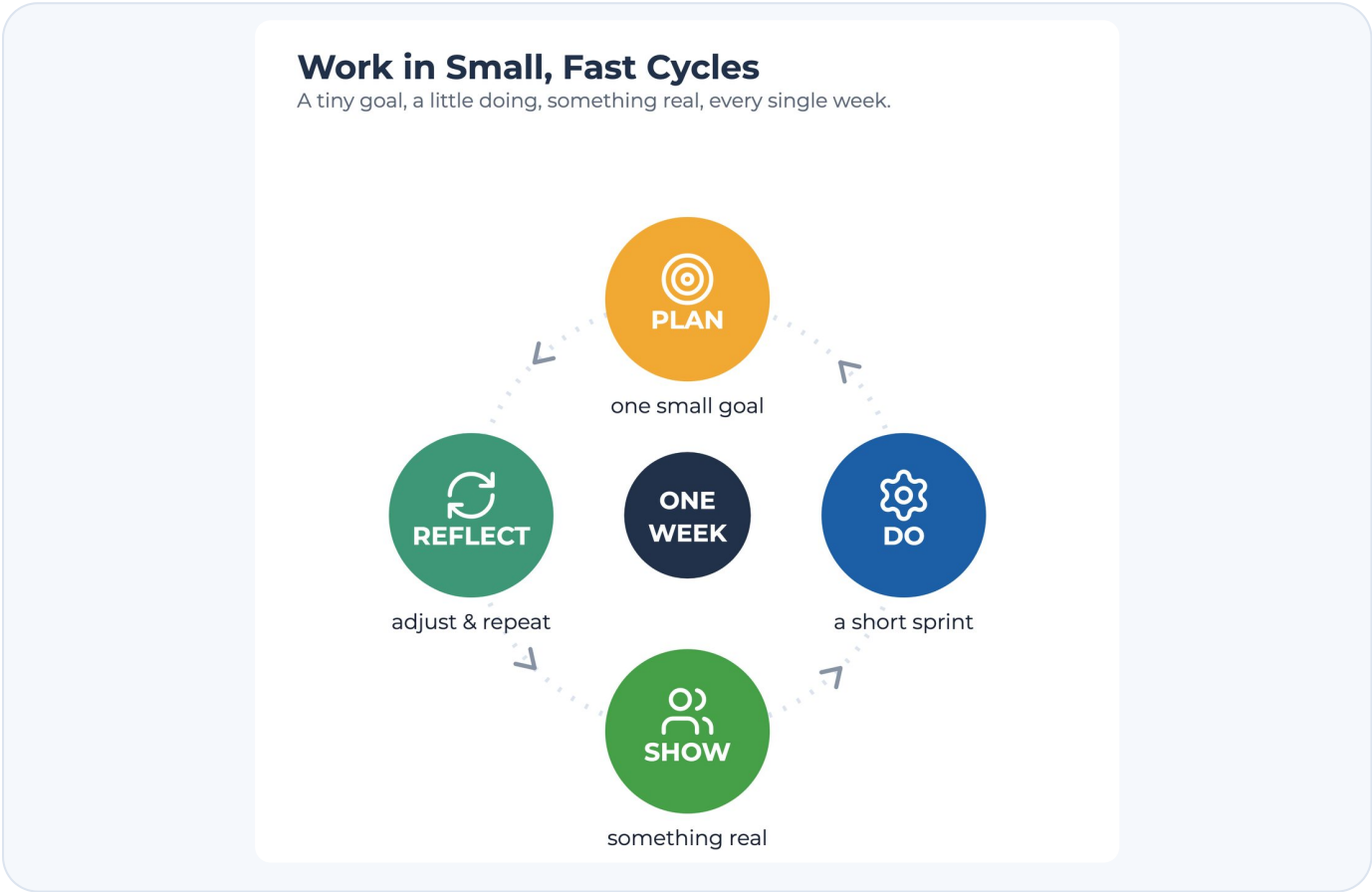
Work in small cycles, plan, do, review, adjust, so you're always shipping and learning, never disappearing for months.

SHIP SMALL, SHIP OFTEN

Work in small cycles

HOW IT WORKS

Take your goal and slice off the smallest useful piece you could finish this week. Plan just that, do it, then honestly review, what worked, what you learned, what's next, and adjust the plan before the next loop. Keep each cycle short and always end it with something real you can look at. Resist planning the whole thing in detail up front; plan the next loop, not the next year.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

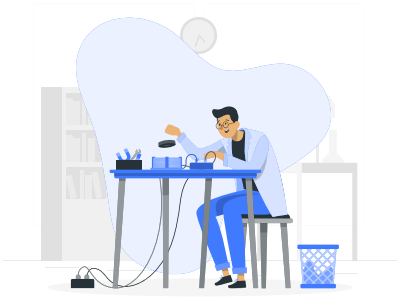
Hugo is building a portfolio site and keeps stalling on “getting it perfect.” He switches to weekly cycles: week one, one page live; week two, three projects added; week three, a contact form. Each week something real ships and gets feedback. In a month it's live and improving, instead of endlessly “almost ready.”

Stop waiting for perfect. Plan a little, ship a little, review, adjust, and repeat, small loops keep you learning and moving while others are still getting ready.

TEST, DON'T GUESS

Run it like an experiment

Most freelancers make big calls, on offers, prices, channels, on gut feeling, then defend them because changing course feels like failure. Running decisions as experiments removes the ego: instead of betting your belief, you design a small test with a result you agree to trust in advance. It's the discipline that turns every uncertain choice into cheap, honest learning rather than an expensive guess you're now committed to.



WHAT IT IS

An experiment is a structured test of one assumption. The tool is an **experiment card**: you write the **assumption** ("I believe X"), the **test** (the smallest way to check it), the **metric** (what you'll measure), and the **pass/fail line** (the result that means yes, and the one that means no), all *before* you run it. Then you run it, record what actually happened, and act on the outcome, not on your hopes.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Deciding the success criteria beforehand is what makes an experiment honest. Run a test without a pre-agreed line and you'll bend any result into confirmation of what you already wanted, learning nothing. The card forces you to commit to the truth in advance, so the outcome can genuinely change your mind. It also makes decisions cheap and reversible: a small, timed test with a clear rule is far safer than a gut-feel commitment you can't easily undo.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Running a "test" with no pre-set pass/fail line, so you interpret the result to suit yourself, or making the experiment so big and slow it's really just the launch. The whole value is in deciding the rule first and keeping the test small. And a result that says "no" is a win too: it saved you from a costly mistake, don't explain it away.

✎ Do this now

Take one decision you're unsure about and fill an experiment card: assumption, smallest test, metric, and the pass/fail line, set the line before you run it. Then run it this week and honour the result.

Facilitator note

Have participants write a pass/fail line *before* designing the test, and hold them to it. The discipline of committing to a rule in advance is the entire lesson, celebrate honest "fails" as money saved.

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

TEST, DON'T GUESS

Run it like an experiment

HOW IT WORKS

Take a decision you're unsure about and fill a card: state the assumption plainly, design the smallest, fastest test of it, choose one clear metric, and, crucially, write the number or outcome that would count as a pass, and the one that would count as a fail, before you start. Run it, record the real result, and do what you promised the result would mean, even if it's not what you hoped.

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

A WORKED EXAMPLE

Rita assumes clients will pay twenty percent more for a “priority” option. Instead of just raising prices, she cards it: test = offer it to the next ten enquiries; metric = how many choose it; pass = three or more. Four do. She's not guessing anymore, she has evidence, and a pre-agreed rule she trusts.

Don't gamble on a hunch, run a small experiment with the pass/fail line set in advance, and let the result, not your ego, make the call.

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

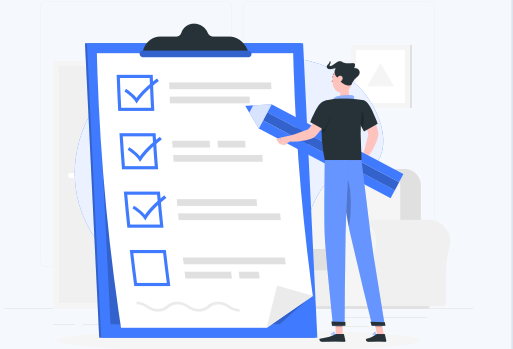
Where did AI genuinely help, and where did my own judgement matter most? **Youthpass:** Digital competence, "I can use AI tools practically and responsibly in my work."

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.



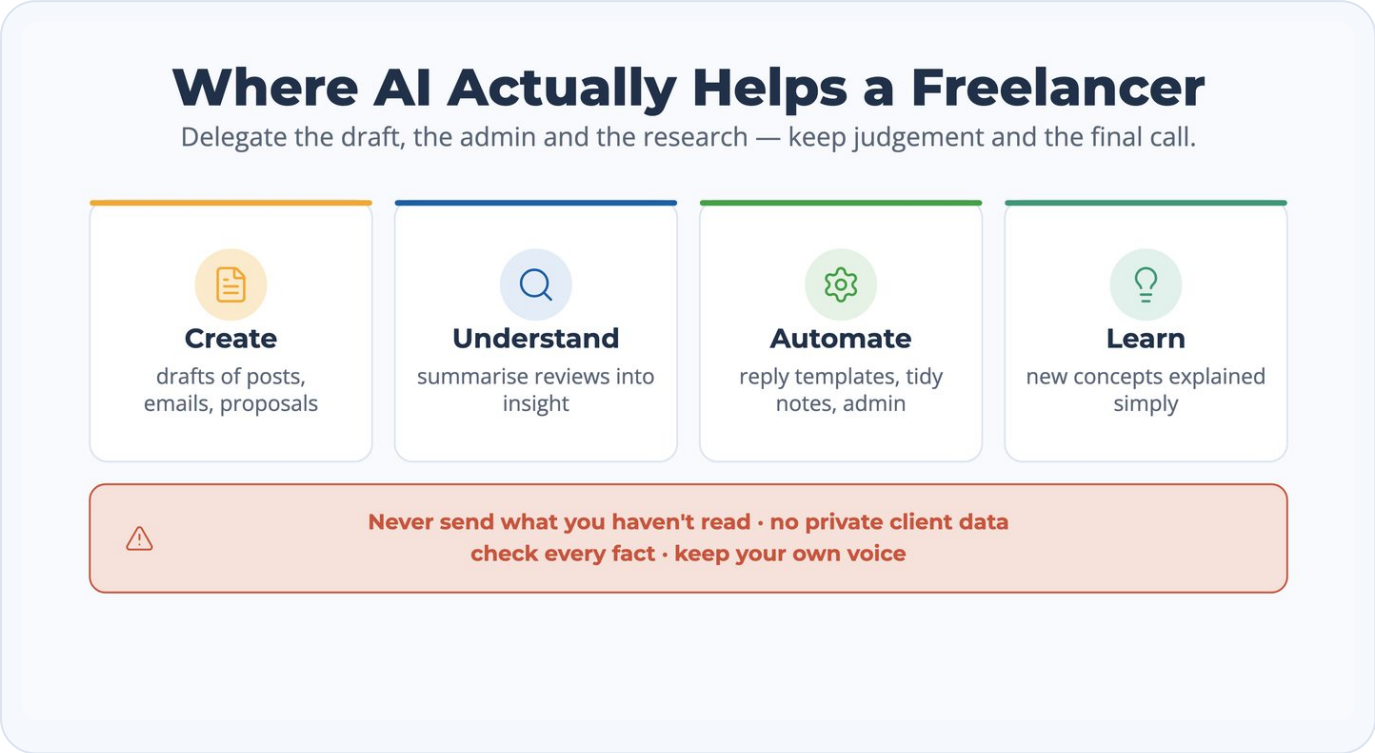
1. **Shortest list wins.** You're finding the single most valuable slice, not a smaller dream.
2. **Delivered by hand.** No brand, no website, no systems, those are earned later.
3. **One real, even small, price.** If someone would pay for just this, today, it's an MVP.

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.

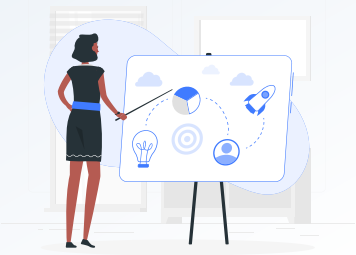
AI is a confident intern, fast and helpful, but you are the boss who checks the work.

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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

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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 most dangerous number in a freelancer's account is the balance, because it lies. It shows cash, money that happens to be sitting there, not profit, the money you've actually earned and get to keep. Confusing the two is how people with plenty in the bank still go broke, and this sub-chapter is about telling them apart.



WHAT IT IS

Cash is money flowing in and out of your account, right now. **Profit** is what remains after every cost, materials, tools, fees, and tax, over a real period. A €2,000 invoice is €2,000 of cash today, but perhaps €800 of profit once costs and tax are removed, and even that isn't spendable if next month is empty. Cash is about *timing*; profit is about *keeping*.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Freelancers get paid in lumps and spend in a steady stream, so the account swings between "rich" and "empty" regardless of whether the work was profitable. Steering by the balance means overspending after a good invoice and panicking after a quiet week, both driven by cash, not reality. Profit tells you whether the business actually works; cash tells you whether you can pay the bills this week. Watch both, but never confuse one for the other.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Treating the account balance as income, spending after a big invoice as if it were all profit, and forgetting the tax you'll owe on it. The classic trap is a great year followed by a tax bill you can't pay, because the money that felt like yours was the government's all along. Separate tax on arrival, always.

✎ Do this now

Open a separate account (or pot) for tax. From your next payment, move a fixed percentage there the day it arrives, before you touch the rest. That one habit prevents most freelancer money disasters.

Facilitator note

Ask who has ever spent money that turned out to be tax. Most hands go up. Use that to make the "split on arrival" habit concrete, have each person name their tax % and where the money will go.

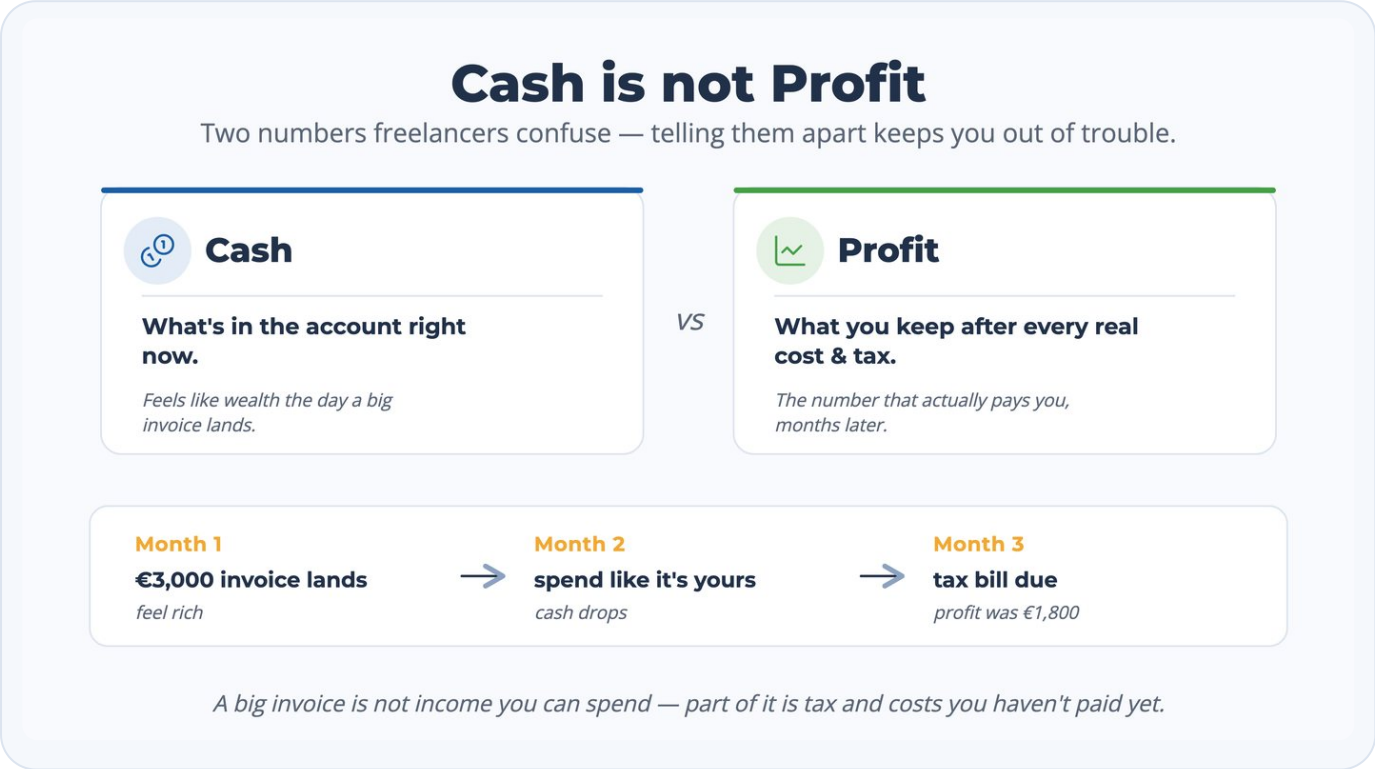
Feeling rich the day an invoice lands is cash. What you keep after costs and tax is profit, steer by that.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Cash is not profit

HOW IT WORKS

For every payment, immediately split it: set aside tax (a fixed % into a separate account, the instant it arrives), account for the costs that job carried, and only treat what's left as yours. Track profit over the month, not the day. And keep a simple eye on cash timing, when money is due in versus when bills are due out, so a profitable business never trips over a badly-timed gap.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Diogo lands a €3,000 project and books a holiday, it felt like a windfall. But €600 was tax he hadn't set aside and €1,500 went on materials and a subcontractor, and the next two months were quiet. The "€3,000" was really about €900 left, and it had to stretch across those empty weeks. Now he splits every payment on arrival and never confuses the balance for earnings again.

Your balance is cash, not earnings. Split every payment on arrival, set the tax aside, and steer the business by profit, what you actually keep, not by what happens to be in the account today.

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The few numbers worth knowing

Money overwhelms people because they imagine full accountancy. In truth a freelancer needs only a few numbers, watched honestly and regularly, to make good decisions. This sub-chapter is those numbers: not a bookkeeping course, but the small dashboard that tells you whether the business is actually working, and where to steer.



WHAT IT IS

The essential few. **Cost to win a client**: the time and money spent to land one. **Value of a client**: what they pay you over the whole relationship. **Monthly running costs**: everything you must pay to keep going, including a basic wage for yourself. **Break-even**: the revenue that covers those costs. And a healthy **ratio**: a client should return at least three times what it cost to win, within a year.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Without these numbers, every decision, whether to take a cheap client, spend on ads, drop a service, is a guess dressed up as intuition. With them, decisions get obvious: a client that costs more to win than they return is a bad deal no matter how busy it makes you feel, and any month below break-even is quietly draining you. A tiny, honest dashboard turns anxiety about money into clear, confident calls.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two extremes: tracking nothing (flying blind) or building an elaborate spreadsheet you never actually check. Also ignoring your own time as a cost when working out what a client takes to win, unpaid hours are still a cost. A rough number you review monthly beats a perfect one you look at once a year.

✎ Do this now

Write down four numbers today, even as estimates: cost to win a client, value of a client, monthly running costs, and your break-even. Then diarise a monthly fifteen-minute check to update them.

Facilitator note

Have participants estimate their break-even out loud, most have never named it. The moment someone realises a "busy" month was below break-even is the lesson; make the four numbers a simple, repeatable monthly ritual.

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

THE NUMBERS THAT MATTER

The few numbers worth knowing

HOW IT WORKS

Work them out roughly, precision isn't the point. Add up what it really costs to land a client (your time counts). Estimate what a typical client is worth over a year. Total your monthly must-pays, including paying yourself. Find the revenue that covers them, your break-even. Then check the two ratios: is each client worth at least 3× the cost to win, and do they earn it back within a year? Review once a month.

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 WORKED EXAMPLE

Cláudia spends about €150 of time to win a client worth €400 a year, roughly 2.7×, and her break-even is €1,800/month. Seeing this, she stops chasing tiny one-off jobs (they cost more to win than they return) and focuses on clients who stay, which lifts both ratios and gets her clear of break-even every month.

You don't need accountancy, you need a small dashboard: cost and value of a client, running costs, and break-even. Watch those few numbers monthly, and money stops being a mystery.

SEE THE YEAR COMING

The 12-month cash-flow forecast

A profitable freelancer can still be sunk by timing, a big bill lands in the exact month the income doesn't. The 12-month cash-flow forecast is the cheap insurance against that: it maps the whole year's ins and outs so you can see the tight months from a distance and act while you still can, instead of discovering them the week they arrive.



WHAT IT IS

A cash-flow forecast is a simple month-by-month table for the year ahead. Each month has three lines: **money in** (expected income, honestly estimated), **money out** (all costs, including tax and paying yourself), and the **running balance** (what's left carrying forward). Read across the year and the shape appears: the strong months, the lean ones, and any point where the balance dips dangerously low, or below zero.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Freelance income is lumpy and seasonal, so any single month is misleading, only the year reveals the pattern. Without the forecast you steer by today's balance and get ambushed by the quiet season or a big annual cost. With it, a thin month three months away becomes a problem you can solve calmly now: take on extra work, delay a purchase, lean on your reserve. It converts financial anxiety into foresight.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two failures. Optimistic income estimates (assuming every “maybe” pays) that hide the real dips, and building the forecast once and never looking again, so it drifts from reality and becomes useless. A forecast is a steering wheel only if you hold it: conservative on income, thorough on costs, reviewed every single month.

✎ Do this now

Sketch a rough 12-month forecast: money in, money out, running balance. Circle the first month the balance looks tight, and write one action you'll take now to soften it.

Facilitator note

Have participants find their tightest month on a rough forecast, most have never looked a year ahead. The relief of spotting a dip early, with time to act, is the point; set a monthly review habit so the forecast stays alive.

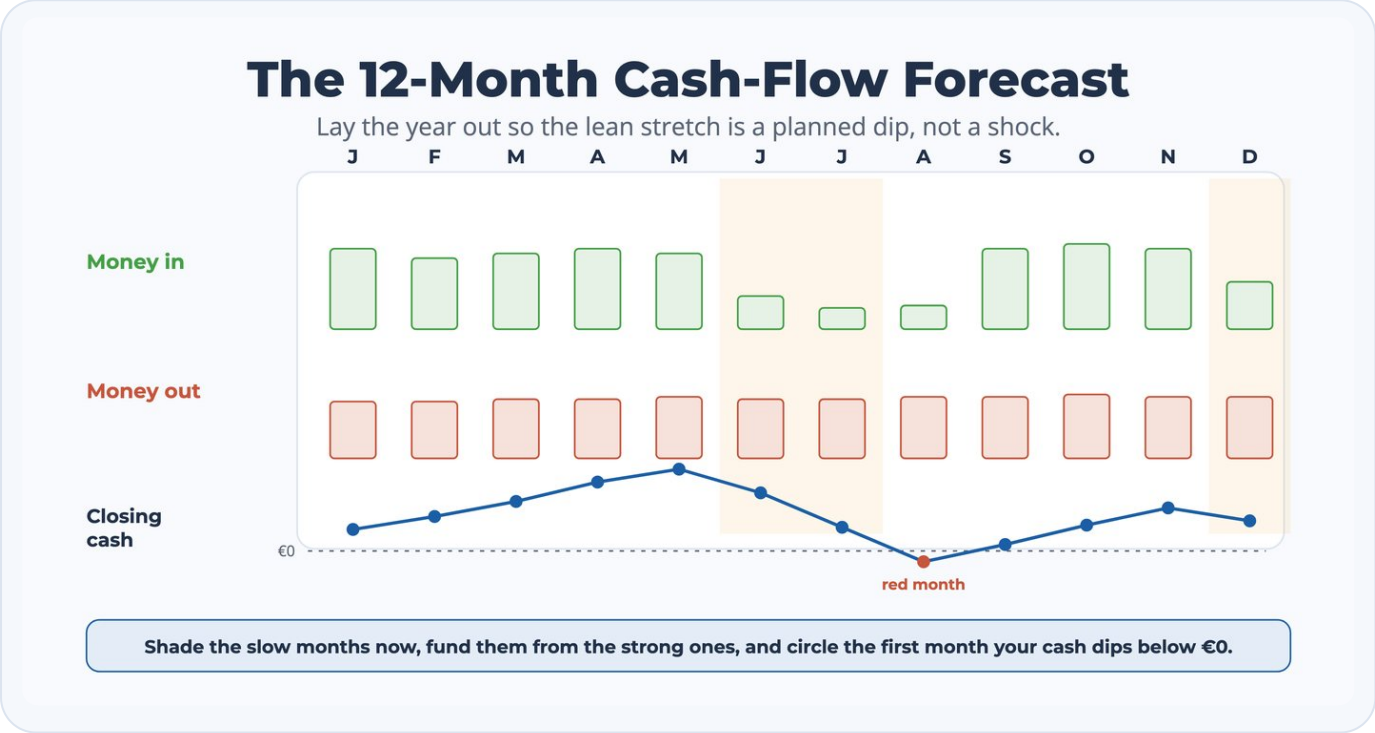
Plan in pencil, review in ink. A budget you never check is a wish; one you review monthly is a steering wheel.

SEE THE YEAR COMING

The 12-month cash-flow forecast

HOW IT WORKS

List the next twelve months. For each, estimate money in (be conservative) and money out (be thorough, include tax, tools, a wage for yourself, and known one-offs). Carry the balance forward month to month. Now scan for trouble: where does the balance dip low or go red? Plan those months now. Then, crucially, review the forecast every month against what actually happened, and adjust, that review is where the value lives.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Mapping her year, Rita sees August's balance goes red, holiday season, no client work, but the annual software bill still lands. Spotting it in spring, she books two small summer projects and moves the software renewal. August arrives uneventful, a crisis quietly prevented six months in advance.

Money problems are usually timing problems. Forecast the whole year, spot the lean months from far off, and review it monthly, so you steer around the dips instead of hitting them.

BUILD A BUFFER

A reserve that protects you

An employee who gets ill still gets paid; a freelancer who gets ill gets nothing. No sick pay, no paid holiday, no cushion, unless you build one. A cash reserve is that cushion, and it's the difference between a quiet month being a minor dip or a genuine emergency that forces you to take bad work at bad prices just to survive.



WHAT IT IS

A reserve is a pot of easily-reachable cash, held separately, equal to some months of your essential living and business costs. Think of it as a ladder: **one month** covered is bare survival; **three months** is real safety, enough to ride out a slow season or a lost client calmly; **six months** is strength, the freedom to turn down bad work, negotiate hard, or take a risk. You build up the rungs over time, in the good months.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Without a reserve, every setback becomes an emergency: a client vanishes, you're ill for a fortnight, a big bill lands, and suddenly you're taking underpriced panic work or borrowing at bad terms. A reserve breaks that cycle. It buys the one thing that protects your prices and standards, the ability to say no. Freelancers with a buffer make better decisions precisely because they're not desperate.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Waiting for “spare” money to start (it never comes, save a slice first), keeping the reserve in your main account where it quietly gets spent, or dipping into it for non-emergencies. Also stopping at one month and calling it done, one month is survival, not safety. Build toward three, then six, and only touch it for real.

✎ Do this now

Open a separate account today and move one small, fixed amount into it, however little. Set that transfer to repeat automatically each time you get paid, and don't count that money as available to spend.

Facilitator note

Ask what a lost main client would mean this month, for most, a scramble. Use that to make the reserve concrete: have each person name their one-month figure and set up one automatic transfer before they leave the room.

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

BUILD A BUFFER

A reserve that protects you

HOW IT WORKS

Work out your essential monthly cost of living plus business. That's one “rung”. In good months, skim a fixed slice of income into a **separate** account before you can spend it, and let it climb, one month, then three, then six. Don't wait to “have spare money”; treat the reserve as a bill you pay yourself first. Keep it genuinely separate and slightly inconvenient to reach, so it survives everyday temptation.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

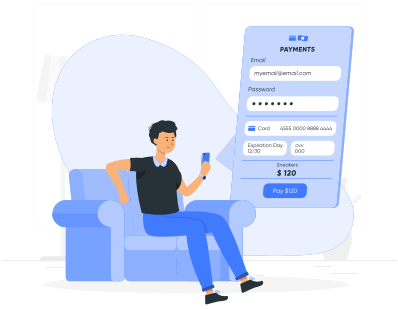
When his main client left, Miguel didn't panic, he had three months of costs saved. Instead of grabbing the first cheap gig, he spent a calm month finding two better clients at his normal rate. The reserve didn't just cover the gap; it stopped him taking work that would have paid less and hurt his positioning.

No one is coming to cover your quiet month, so build the net yourself. Save a slice in the good months, keep it separate and out of reach, and a bad month becomes a manageable one instead of a crisis.

CHARGE WHAT IT'S WORTH

Price with confidence

Most freelancers charge too little, and the reason is almost never bad maths, it's fear: fear of the “no”, of seeming greedy, of not being worth it. Under-pricing feels safe but quietly starves the business and trains clients to undervalue you. Pricing with confidence isn't about being expensive; it's about knowing two numbers and stating them calmly.



WHAT IT IS

Two numbers anchor every price. Your **floor** is the rate below which a job actually loses you money, once costs, tax, unpaid admin time and a fair wage for yourself are all counted, a hard line you never cross. Your **value** is what the outcome is worth to the client, the result they get, not the hours you spend. Good pricing sits above the floor and moves toward the value, delivered as a plain, unapologetic number.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Price too low and three things happen: you can't build a reserve or reinvest, you attract clients who haggle and disrespect the work, and you signal that even you don't rate it. Under-pricing is a tax you pay for a moment's comfort. Knowing your floor protects you from loss-making work; pricing toward value lets you earn what the result is worth; and saying the number without flinching is what makes clients believe it. Confidence is part of the price.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Quoting from fear, undercutting your floor to avoid a “no”, discounting before you're even asked, or pricing by your hours instead of the client's outcome. Also filling the silence after your price with a nervous reduction. The “no” from a client who won't pay your floor is a good outcome, it protects your time for clients who will.

✎ Do this now

Calculate your true floor today, costs, tax, unpaid time, a fair wage, and write it down as a line you won't cross. Then, on your next quote, price toward the client's outcome and say the number without adding an apology.

Facilitator note

Have participants say a price out loud to a partner and stay silent afterwards, the flinch is visible and instructive. Work out floors together; realising how much unpaid time and tax they'd forgotten is often the moment their prices rise.

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

CHARGE WHAT IT'S WORTH

Price with confidence

HOW IT WORKS

First, calculate your floor honestly, costs, tax, unpaid time, a real wage, and commit never to quote under it. Then, for each job, ask what the outcome is worth to the client and price up toward that, not down from your hours. Finally, practise saying the number plainly, no nervous discount, no “but I could do less”. State it, then stay quiet. The silence after a confident price is where deals are made.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

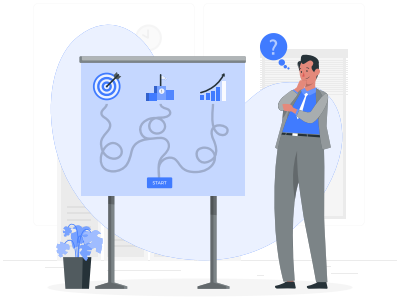
Ana quoted €200 for a logo, terrified of losing the job, and won clients who haggled. She recalculates: her floor is €350, and a logo that anchors a brand is worth far more to the client. She now quotes €600 without flinching. She loses the bargain-hunters and wins clients who value the work, earning triple for the same skill.

Under-pricing is fear, not strategy. Set a floor you never break, price toward the value you create, and state the number plainly, the confidence is part of what the client is buying.

DECIDE WITH A RULE

Five money decision rules

The hardest money decisions always come at the worst time, when you're anxious, tempted, or short of cash, exactly when judgement is poorest. The trick used by disciplined businesses is to move the decision earlier: agree simple rules when you're calm and clear-headed, so that in the stressful moment you don't agonise, you just follow the rule you already trust.



WHAT IT IS

A money rule is a decision made in advance for a recurring situation. A freelancer's core set might be: **only spend what you can afford to lose** on any bet; **sleep on any big or irreversible purchase**; **never touch the tax money**, ever; **keep the reserve for real emergencies only**; and **decide fast on small reversible things, slow on large irreversible ones**. The specific rules matter less than having them, and following them.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Willpower and judgement collapse under stress, which is precisely when big money decisions tend to land. Pre-set rules take the decision out of the stressful moment and put it in a calm one, where you think clearly. They also protect you from your own patterns, the panic discount, the impulse upgrade, the “I'll pay the tax back later”, by making the good choice automatic. Rules turn discipline from a daily battle into a one-time decision.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Making every money decision from scratch, in the moment, under stress, and treating them all the same, agonising over trivial reversible ones while rushing the big irreversible ones. Also breaking your own rules “just this once” (especially raiding the tax or reserve). A rule you override under pressure isn't a rule; the whole point is that it holds when you're tempted.

✎ Do this now

Write three money rules for the situations that catch you out, e.g. a spending threshold you'll always sleep on, and “never touch the tax”. Put them somewhere you'll see them, and commit to following, not re-debating, them.

Facilitator note

Ask for the last money decision someone regrets, then reverse-engineer the rule that would have prevented it. Building a shared shortlist of rules, and the fast/slow split, gives everyone a calm framework to carry into the stressful moment.

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

DECIDE WITH A RULE

Five money decision rules

HOW IT WORKS

In a calm moment, write down your handful of money rules, especially for the situations that trip you up. Split decisions by reversibility: cheap and easily undone, decide quickly and don't overthink; expensive or hard to reverse, slow down, sleep on it, check it against your rules, forecast and reserve. Then, in the hard moment, don't re-open the debate, follow the rule. Review the rules occasionally when calm, never mid-crisis.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Tempted by a shiny €900 tool during a good week, Sofia hits her rule: “sleep on any purchase over €300.” The next morning the urgency is gone and she realises a €40 alternative does the job. The rule didn't make her stingy, it just moved the decision out of the excited moment into a clear one.

Don't decide money in the moment of stress. Set simple rules when you're calm, decide fast on the small reversible things and slow on the big irreversible ones, then, when it's hard, just follow the rule.

GO LEGIT, PLAN IT

Plan the transition, don't fear it

For a young freelancer, especially one relying on a benefit or allowance, going legit can look like a trap: you give up support and take on tax and paperwork, seemingly for nothing. But informality has a hidden bill, no protection, no rights, a ceiling on the clients and funding you can reach. The honest answer isn't to avoid formalising or to rush it, but to plan the transition so you cross the gap safely and come out ahead.



WHAT IT IS

Going legit means moving from informal, cash-in-hand work into the formal system: registering, invoicing, paying tax and contributions. It carries obligations (tax, admin) but also unlocks **rights and access**: social protection like pension and sick cover, the ability to sign enforceable contracts and access credit or grants, and clients, especially bigger or public ones, who legally cannot pay someone unregistered. The "benefits trap" is the real risk that registering costs you an allowance you depend on, which is why *timing* matters.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Staying informal feels free but quietly caps you: you can't take the clients or funding that require a registered supplier, you have no legal protection if a client doesn't pay, and you build no pension or safety net. Yet leaping without planning can drop you into a gap, losing a benefit before your income reliably replaces it. Understanding both sides lets you make the move deliberately, capturing the rights and access while stepping over the benefits cliff instead of falling into it.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two opposite errors: staying informal out of fear and forfeiting rights, protection and better clients, or leaping without checking the thresholds and losing a benefit before your income can replace it. Also assuming the rules from a friend or another country apply to you, allowances and thresholds are local and change. Check the real figures, then plan the crossing.

✎ Do this now

Find the two numbers that matter for your country: the income point where formalising makes sense, and the threshold where any benefit you receive changes. Then sketch a transition plan, when, and how your reserve bridges any gap.

Facilitator note

Country rules differ and change, have participants look up their own current thresholds rather than trusting hearsay. Frame formalising around the rights and access it unlocks, while taking the benefits cliff seriously and planning the timing.

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

GO LEGIT, PLAN IT

Plan the transition, don't fear it

HOW IT WORKS

First, get the real numbers for your country: at what income does registration become required or worthwhile, and exactly which benefits or allowances change, and at what thresholds? Then time it: plan the move for when your formal income will clear the gap left by any lost support, and use your reserve to bridge any short-term shortfall. Treat it as a planned transition with a date and a buffer, not a scary all-or-nothing jump.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Tomás relied on a small allowance and feared registering would end it. Instead of guessing, he checked the thresholds: he could register and keep partial support until his income passed a clear line. He timed the switch to a month with two confirmed clients, used his reserve as backup, and crossed the gap without a single lean week.

Informality has a hidden cost: no rights, no protection, a ceiling on your growth. Formalising trades some support for real rights and room to grow, so don't fear it or rush it, check the thresholds and plan the transition.

MATCH MONEY TO STAGE

The funding map

Needing money and reaching for the wrong kind is how young founders quietly hand away control or drown in interest. Financing has a natural order, cheapest and least binding first, and most freelancers never need the expensive end at all. The funding map lays out the ladder so you take the right kind of money for your stage, and don't give away tomorrow to solve today.



WHAT IT IS

A ladder of funding, cheapest to most costly. **Your own revenue**, reinvested profit and low costs: free, and keeps you fully in control. **Grants and youth schemes**: non-repayable public or EU support, especially for young and under-represented entrepreneurs. **Microloans**: small, repayable sums for a tested plan that needs a push, cost interest but not ownership. **Equity / investment**: money for a share of the business, appropriate only for proven, scalable models, and it costs control, permanently.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Each rung costs more than the one below, in money, control, or both. Reinvested revenue costs nothing; a grant costs an application; a loan costs interest; equity costs a piece of your business forever. Reaching for an investor or a big loan to fund an unproven idea is both expensive and risky, you take on cost or give away ownership before you even know it works. Starting at the bottom keeps you cheap, in control, and forces you to prove the idea before you fund it heavily.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Jumping straight to loans or investors for an unproven idea, taking on interest or giving away ownership before the model works, and overlooking grants and youth schemes, which are often available to young entrepreneurs and cost nothing but an application. Also giving away equity far too early and too cheaply. Climb from the bottom; most freelancers never need the top rung.

✎ Do this now

Before seeking any outside money, name the cheapest rung that could fund your next step. Then spend an hour searching for one grant or youth scheme you might qualify for, non-repayable money is worth the search.

Facilitator note

Many participants assume “funding” means an investor. Walk the ladder and dwell on grants and youth schemes relevant to their country, then have each person identify the lowest rung that fits their real stage.

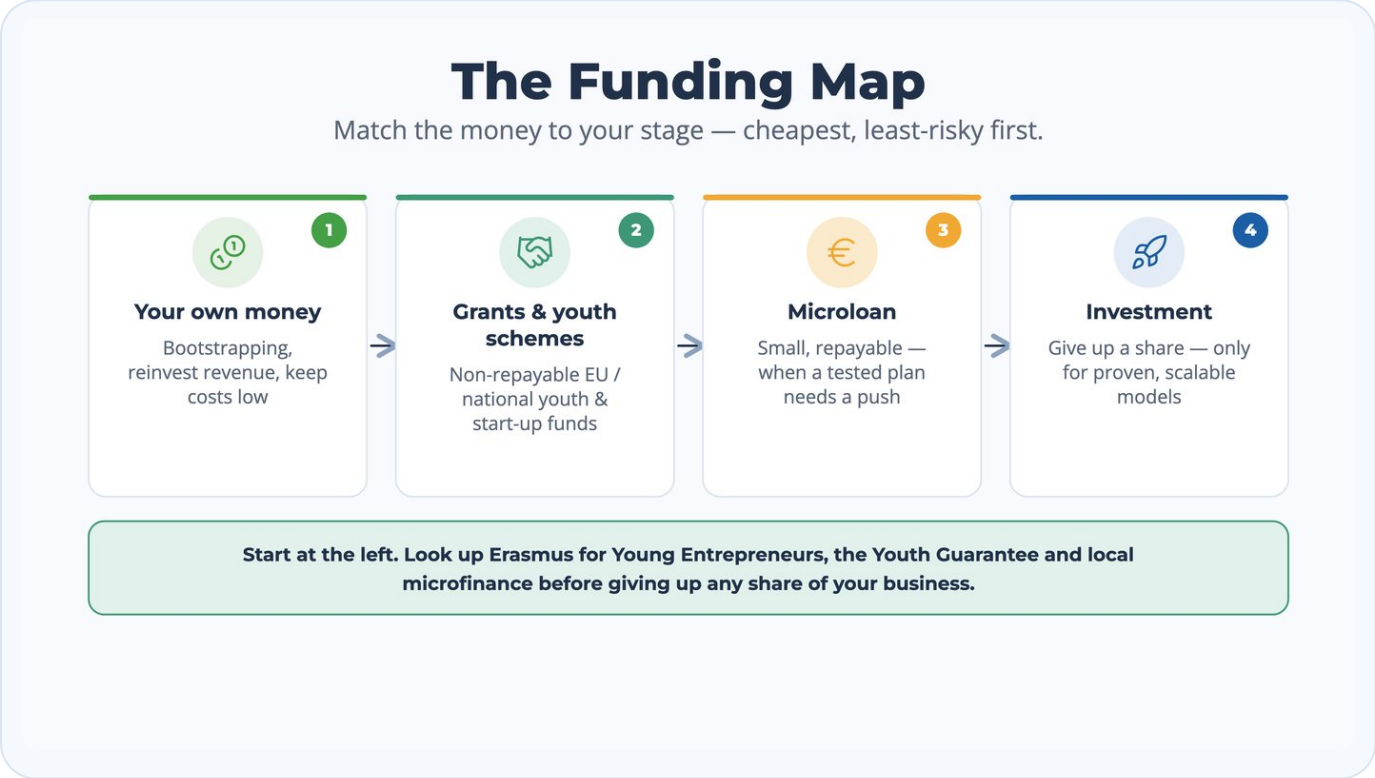
Match the money to your stage, cheapest first. Reinvest, then grants, then microloans, equity last.

MATCH MONEY TO STAGE

The funding map

HOW IT WORKS

Match the money to your stage. Still testing or early? Fund it with reinvested revenue and lean spending, and hunt for grants and youth schemes, non-repayable money is the best money there is. Have a tested plan that needs a modest push? A microloan may fit. Only when the model is proven and genuinely scalable should you consider equity, and understand you're trading permanent ownership for it. Always exhaust the cheaper rung first.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Léa wanted an investor for her craft business. Instead she climbed the ladder: she reinvested her first profits, won a small youth-entrepreneurship grant that bought her equipment, and later took a tiny microloan for stock. She grew without a single share given away, and kept full control of a business that's now genuinely hers.

Don't reach for the expensive money first. Reinvest, chase grants, use small loans if needed, and keep equity for last, matching the money to your stage keeps you cheap, in control, and honest about whether the idea's proven.

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

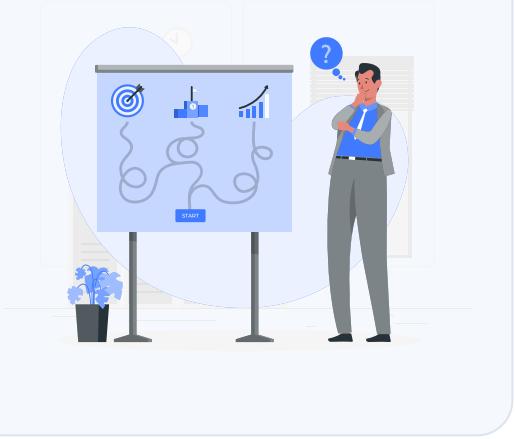
Do I know my floor, my margin and my next red month? Which one will I act on first?

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.

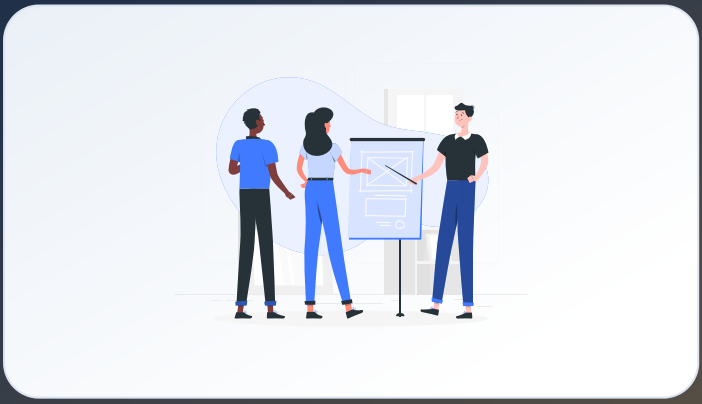
Every money term here is just plain sense with a label. Learn the word once, and the fear goes with it.

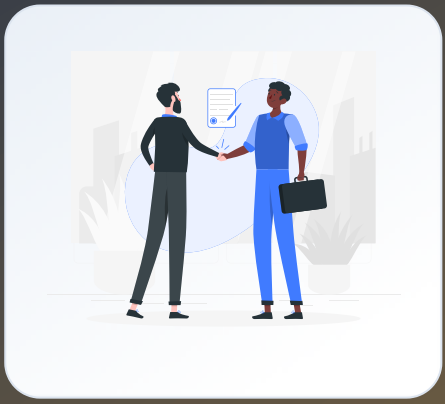
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MODULE 4 · FREELANCER-TO-STARTUP TOOLKIT

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

The biggest shift from freelancer to trusted professional is what you think you're selling. Beginners sell the task, the logo, the website, the hours, and end up haggling against everyone who offers the same task. Professionals sell the outcome, the result the client actually wants, and become almost impossible to compare on price. This sub-chapter is that shift.



WHAT IT IS

Selling the outcome means leading with the **result** your work creates, not the **deliverable** you hand over. A client doesn't want “a website” (a task); they want more enquiries, more trust, more sales (outcomes). Same work, completely different conversation: the task is *what you do*; the outcome is *why it matters to them*. Your job is to talk about the why, and let the what follow.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

When you describe the task, you invite comparison, every freelancer offering that task, listed by price, and you lose to the cheapest. When you describe the outcome, there's nothing to compare you to, because you're the only one promising that specific change. Outcomes also justify higher prices: a logo priced by hours is worth a little; a logo that makes a business look instantly credible is worth a lot. Selling the outcome moves you out of the price war and into value.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Listing your deliverables and your process (pages, revisions, hours, tools) and assuming the client will work out the value themselves, they won't. Talking about your craft instead of their result puts you straight into a price comparison you'll usually lose. Also over-promising an outcome you can't influence: promise the change your work genuinely drives, not a miracle.

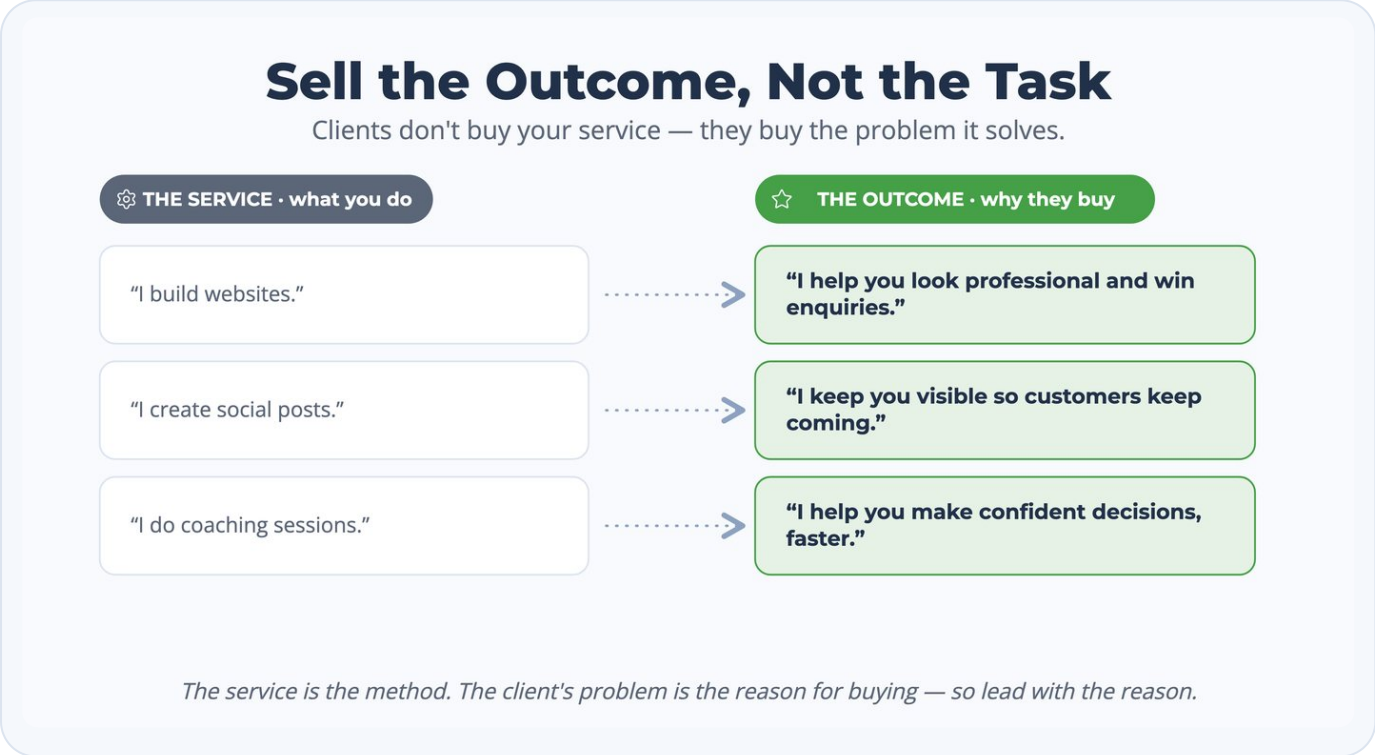
The service is the method. The client's problem is the reason for buying, so lead with the reason.

WHAT CLIENTS ACTUALLY BUY

Sell the outcome, not the task

HOW IT WORKS

Before every pitch, translate your service into the client's result. Ask “so that…” until you reach something they actually care about: I design logos, so that your business looks professional, so that clients trust you before you speak, so that you win more work. Lead with that end result, then explain the task as the way you'll deliver it. Talk about their world (customers, trust, sales), not yours (files, revisions, deliverables).



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Miguel used to quote “a 5-page website, €600.” He kept losing to cheaper offers. Now he says: “You'll have a site that turns visitors into enquiries, so more of the people who find you actually get in touch.” Same website. But clients stop comparing him to the €300 quote, because no one else is promising more enquiries, and he wins the work at €900.

Clients buy results, not tasks. Translate your service into the change the client will feel, lead with that, and the task becomes the method, not the pitch. Sell the outcome and you leave the price war behind.

THE MINDSET THAT WINS

Understand first, sell later

Most freelancers lose the sale in the first five minutes, by talking. Nervous to prove their worth, they pitch their services before they understand the client's problem, and end up recommending the wrong thing to a person who doesn't yet trust them. The professional mindset is the reverse: come to understand, not to sell. Do that, and the sale takes care of itself.



WHAT IT IS

“Understand first, sell later” is a mindset, not a tactic. It means every early conversation is aimed at **understanding the client's situation and problem**, not at presenting your services. You ask, you listen, you dig, and you hold your recommendation until you genuinely grasp what they need. Selling isn't a separate performance at the end; it's the natural result of having understood better than anyone else did.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Two things happen when you understand before selling. First, you earn trust, people buy from those who clearly get their problem, and every good question signals that more than any pitch. Second, you find the **real** problem, which is often not the one they first named, so your eventual recommendation actually fits. Freelancers who pitch first do neither: they seem self-interested, and they solve the wrong problem. Understanding first is what separates a trusted advisor from a salesperson people avoid.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Pitching in the first five minutes: reciting your services, your process and your prices before you understand what the client needs. It signals you care about selling, not solving, and it locks you into whatever task they first named, which is rarely the real problem. Talking more than you listen is the single most common way freelancers lose winnable work.

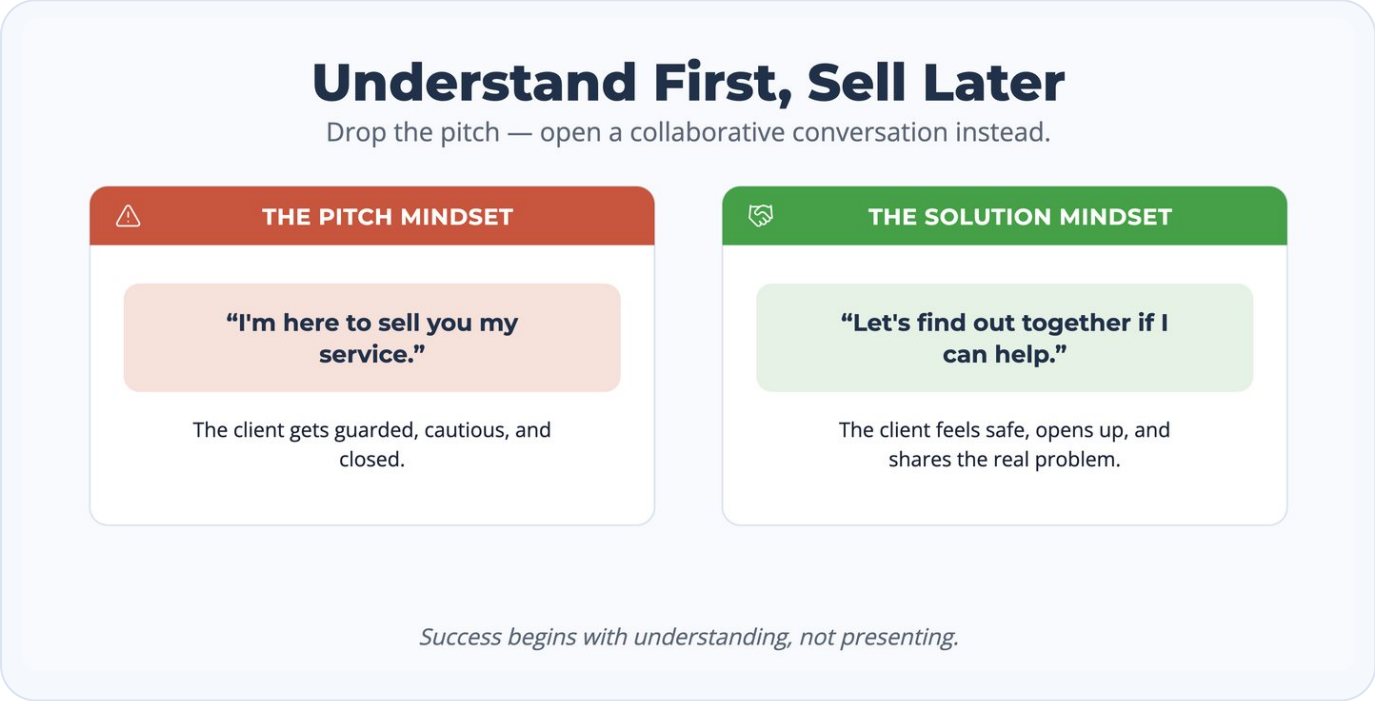
Approach every conversation to understand, not to pitch. Success begins with understanding, not presenting.

THE MINDSET THAT WINS

Understand first, sell later

HOW IT WORKS

Walk into every first conversation with one goal: understand, not impress. Ask open questions about their situation, their frustration, what they've tried, what success would look like. Listen more than you talk, resist the urge to jump in with solutions. Only once you can describe their problem back to them better than they did should you start to recommend, and even then, connect it to what you heard. Treat the sale as the by-product of understanding.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A client told Sofia "I need a new logo." The old Sofia would have quoted a logo. Instead she asked why now, what's not working, what they wanted clients to feel. It turned out the real problem was that their whole brand looked amateur and lost them deals. She recommended a small brand refresh, worth five times a logo, and won it, because she'd understood the actual problem, not the requested task.

Come to understand, not to sell. Ask and listen until you grasp the real problem better than the client stated it, trust and the right recommendation both follow. Understanding first isn't a soft skill; it's how the sale is won.

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

The four-step conversation

A good sales conversation isn't improvised charm, it follows a shape. The four-step conversation gives freelancers who "hate selling" a reliable structure: **Discover the pain, Identify the need, Envision success, Recommend.** The magic is that only the last step is a pitch; the first three are pure understanding. Master the shape and selling stops being a performance and becomes a conversation.



WHAT IT IS

Four ordered steps. **1 · Discover the pain**: understand what's actually frustrating the client, past the surface symptom. **2 · Identify the need**: turn that pain into a clear statement of what they need to change. **3 · Envision success**: help them picture what life looks like once it's solved. **4 · Recommend**: propose your solution as the bridge to that vision. Three steps of understanding, then one of proposing, always in that order.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

The order is everything. Recommend too early (the common instinct) and you're pitching a solution to a problem you haven't understood, to someone who doesn't yet want to change. Work through the first three steps and by the time you recommend, the client has already agreed there's a painful problem, named what they need, and pictured the better future, so your recommendation lands as the obvious next step, not a hard sell. The structure does the persuading, so you don't have to.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Jumping to step 4. The overwhelming freelancer error is to recommend a solution in the first few minutes, before discovering the pain, naming the need or building the vision. It turns a conversation into a pitch and forces you to persuade against resistance. The other mistake is doing the steps out of order, envisioning success before you've understood the pain feels hollow.

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

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE

The four-step conversation

HOW IT WORKS

Consciously move through the steps and don't skip ahead. Start by exploring the pain with open questions (step 1, the longest). Reflect back the need you're hearing until they agree you've got it (step 2). Ask what solving it would make possible, and let them describe the win (step 3). Only then recommend, explicitly connecting your solution to the pain and vision they just described (step 4). If step 4 feels like a struggle, go back, you rushed the understanding.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

With a café owner, Tomás spends most of the meeting on the pain (empty weekday afternoons) and the need (more regulars, not more passers-by), then asks what a fuller café would mean (steady income, less stress). Only then does he recommend a simple loyalty campaign, framed as exactly that bridge. The owner says yes immediately, because Tomás is offering the future she just described.

Selling is a structure, not a talent: discover the pain, identify the need, envision success, then recommend. Spend your time in the first three steps and the fourth sells itself. If the pitch feels hard, you skipped ahead.

THE LONGEST STEP

Discover the pain

Step one of the conversation, discovering the pain, is where deals are won or lost, and it's the step freelancers rush most. Clients almost never hand you their real problem; they hand you a requested task that's really a symptom. Your job is to gently dig underneath it, with open questions and real curiosity, until you reach the pain that's actually driving them. Solve the symptom and you disappoint; solve the pain and you're indispensable.



WHAT IT IS

Discovering the pain means uncovering the **real frustration** behind what the client asked for. The request ("I need a logo", "I need a website", "I need social media") is usually a symptom; the pain is the deeper problem it points to (losing clients, looking amateur, feeling invisible). You discover it by asking open questions and listening, going past the first answer to what's really wrong. It's step one because everything else, the need, the vision, the recommendation, depends on getting it right.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

If you solve the symptom instead of the pain, you do exactly what was asked and still leave the client unsatisfied, because the real problem remains. Worse, you miss the chance to offer something more valuable: the deeper the pain you reach, the bigger and better-paid the solution you can honestly recommend. Discovering the pain also builds trust, clients feel understood when you reach the thing they couldn't quite name themselves. It's the longest step because it's the one everything rests on.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Taking the client's first request at face value and quoting it, solving the symptom while the real pain, and the bigger opportunity, go untouched. The other mistake is interrogating instead of conversing: firing questions without listening, or leading the client to the answer you want. Discovery is patient, curious listening, not a checklist you rush through to get to the pitch.

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

THE LONGEST STEP

Discover the pain

HOW IT WORKS

Ask open, non-leading questions and let the client talk: what's prompting this now? what's not working? what happens if it stays like this? what have you already tried? Listen for the frustration behind the facts, and gently ask “why” or “tell me more” to go deeper. Don't accept the first answer as the whole story, and don't rush to solutions. You've discovered the pain when you can state it back and the client says “yes, exactly.”



A WORKED EXAMPLE

“I need a new logo,” said the client. Instead of quoting, Rita asked why now. “Our sales are down.” Why do you think? “People pick competitors over us.” Any idea why? “Honestly... we look cheap next to them.” There it is, the pain isn't the logo, it's looking cheap and losing sales. Rita can now solve something that matters, not just draw a symbol.

The client's request is a symptom; the pain is underneath it. Ask open questions and keep gently digging until you can state the real frustration back and hear “yes, exactly.” Discover the pain first, everything else depends on it.

REACH THE ROOT

The 5-Why method

The 5-Why method is one of the most effective tools in this module, and one of the most powerful. Borrowed from problem-solving, it's just this: when a client states a problem, ask “why?”, and keep asking, roughly five times. Each answer takes you one layer deeper, from the surface symptom down to the root cause. It's the practical technique that makes step one, discovering the pain, actually work.



WHAT IT IS

The 5-Why method is a chain of questions. You start with the stated problem and ask **why** it's happening. To that answer you ask **why** again, and again, typically five times, though the number isn't sacred. Each “why” strips away a layer, moving from symptom (“sales are down”) toward root cause (“clients don't trust how we look”). The last answer is usually the real problem, the one worth solving, and the one your competitors never reached because they stopped at the first.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Problems present as symptoms, and symptoms are shallow, fixing them changes nothing for long. The root cause is where a real, lasting solution lives, and where your value is greatest: anyone can address the surface complaint, but solving the underlying cause is what makes you worth paying properly. The 5-Why method also protects you from solving the wrong problem, by forcing you to keep going until the answers stop being symptoms. It turns vague frustration into a clear, addressable root.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Stopping at the first “why” and treating that answer as the problem, it's still a symptom. The opposite mistake is making it an interrogation: rattling off “why” like a machine until the client feels cross-examined. Keep it conversational and collaborative. And don't cling rigidly to exactly five, the point is to reach the root, whether that takes three whys or six.

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

REACH THE ROOT

The 5-Why method

HOW IT WORKS

Take the client's stated problem and ask, out loud or together, “why does that happen?” Take their answer and ask why again. Repeat until the answers stop pointing to a deeper cause, usually around the fifth why. Stay genuinely curious, not interrogating, and let the client do the reasoning. When you reach something that, if fixed, would dissolve the whole chain above it, you've found the root, and that's what you build your recommendation around.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Sales are down. Why? Fewer enquiries. Why? People visit the site but leave. Why? It looks untrustworthy. Why? It was built quickly years ago and never updated. Why? No one owned it. Five whys turned “sales are down” into “no one has owned our online credibility,” a root cause Léa can actually solve, and price, far beyond a quick patch.

Ask “why?” about five times and each answer digs a layer deeper, from symptom to root cause. Solve the root, not the surface, that's where the real value, and the real price, live.

CONNECT THE GAP

Bridge today to the future

Steps two to four of the conversation, identify the need, envision success, recommend, are really one movement: building a bridge. On one bank is the client's present pain; on the other is the future they want. Your solution is the span that carries them across. The whole art is to make both banks vivid and then present your recommendation as the natural bridge between them, using the client's own words, not your sales script.



WHAT IT IS

The bridge has four parts in order. **Pain**: the real problem you discovered. **Need**: what that pain means they must change ("you need to look as credible as you actually are"). **Vision**: the future once it's solved, described so they can feel it ("imagine winning the deals you're currently losing"). **Solution**: your recommendation, presented as the bridge from the pain to that vision. Each part builds on the last, and the solution comes only at the end.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

A recommendation offered without this bridge is just an opinion, easy to doubt, easy to price-shop. Built on the bridge, the same recommendation feels inevitable, because the client has already agreed to the pain, accepted the need, and wanted the vision. You're no longer persuading; you're connecting two points they already believe in. And because you use their own words for the pain and vision, the solution feels custom-made, because it is, which is exactly what justifies a real price.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Recommending before the far bank exists, pitching a solution when the client hasn't yet felt the pain or pictured the vision, so there's nothing for the bridge to connect. The other mistake is switching into your own language and generic benefits at the recommendation, dropping their words. The bridge only holds if both banks are vivid and the solution is tied to exactly what they said.

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

CONNECT THE GAP

Bridge today to the future

HOW IT WORKS

After discovering the pain, say it back and get agreement. Turn it into the need ("so what you really need is…") and check that lands. Then paint the vision: ask or describe what success looks like, and let them feel it. Only now recommend, and explicitly tie your solution to the pain and vision you just shared: "to get from [their pain] to [their vision], here's what I'd suggest." Use their language throughout, so the bridge is clearly built for them.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

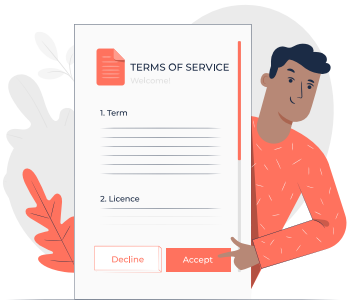
"So the pain is you're losing deals because you look amateur (pain). You need to look as trustworthy as you are (need). Picture winning those deals instead of watching them go elsewhere (vision). To get you there, I'd suggest a brand refresh and a sharper website (solution)." The client hears their own problem and their own dream, joined by Ana's recommendation, and simply agrees.

Your solution is a bridge from the client's pain to their vision. Make both banks vivid, name the need between them, and present your recommendation as the span, in their words. Built that way, the sale feels less like persuasion and more like the obvious way across.

WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

Handle objections like a pro

Objections are where nervous freelancers panic, either caving instantly (“okay, I'll drop the price”) or pushing hard (“but it's really worth it!”). The professional does neither. They treat every objection as what it usually is: a question about value or risk that hasn't been answered yet. Instead of defending, they get curious, understand the real concern, and calmly guide the conversation back to the outcome. This sub-chapter turns objections from a threat into an opportunity.



WHAT IT IS

An objection is any hesitation a client raises, “it's too expensive,” “I need to think,” “can you do it cheaper,” “I'm not sure.” The key insight is that an objection is almost never a flat no; it's a **question in disguise**, usually about whether the value is worth the cost or risk. Handling it well means not arguing and not caving, but uncovering the real concern behind the words and addressing that, then reconnecting to the outcome the client wanted.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Freelancers lose good work by mishandling this moment. Cave, and you train clients to distrust your prices and devalue your work. Push, and you make them defensive and dig them in. Neither addresses the actual concern, which stays unspoken and unresolved. Treating the objection as a question lets you answer what's really worrying them, and often reveals it was never really about price at all. Handled with curiosity, the objection becomes the exact point where trust, and the sale, are won.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

The two panic responses: caving (dropping price the instant anyone hesitates, which devalues you and invites more haggling) and pushing (arguing the client out of their objection, which makes them defensive). Both skip the real move, understanding what's actually behind the hesitation. Assuming “too expensive” literally means your price is too high, rather than a question about value, is the classic misread.

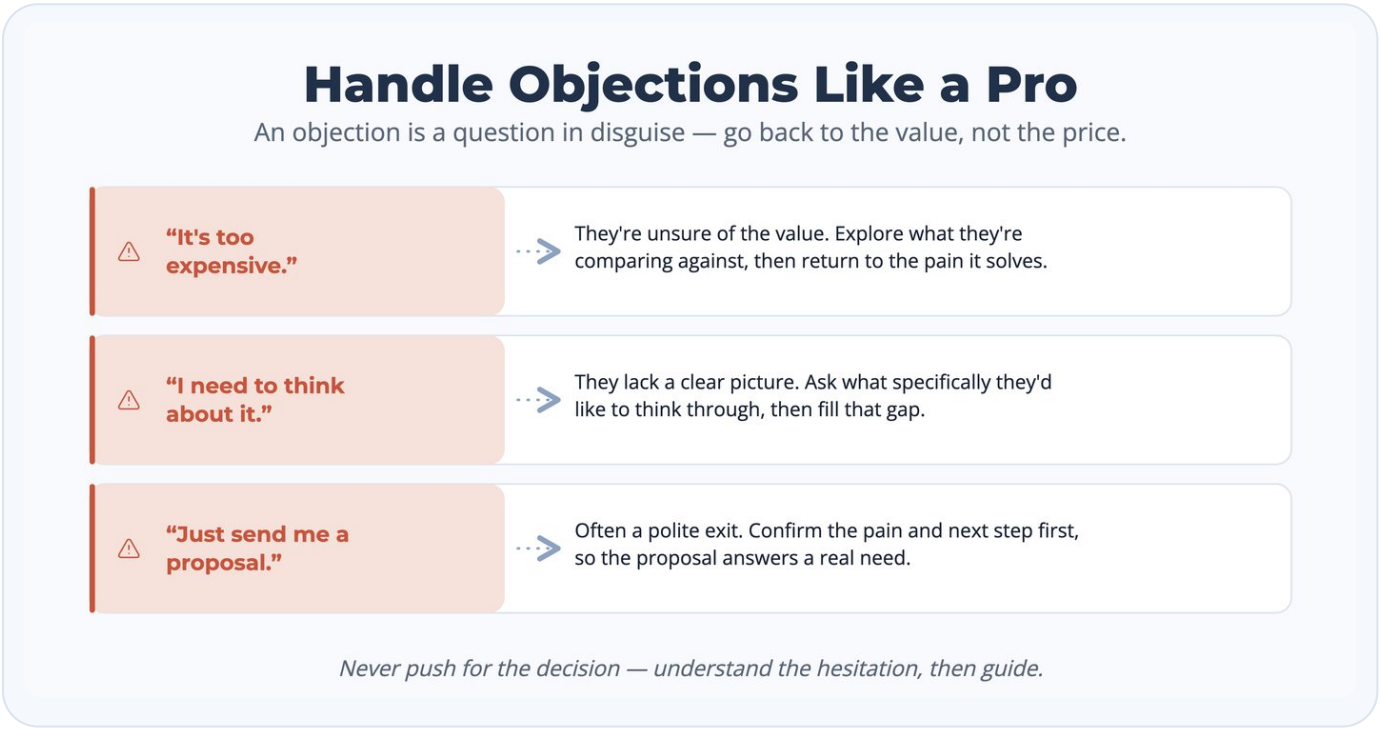
An objection is a question about value. Never push, understand the hesitation, then guide back to the outcome.

WHEN THEY PUSH BACK

Handle objections like a pro

HOW IT WORKS

When an objection comes, don't react, get curious. Acknowledge it (“that's fair”), then ask what's behind it: “when you say it's too much, is it the budget, or not yet clear it's worth it?” Listen to the real concern. Address that specifically, often by reconnecting to the outcome and value they cared about, not by dropping your price on reflex. Then check you've resolved it. Stay calm and on their side; you're solving their hesitation together, not defending yourself against an attack.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

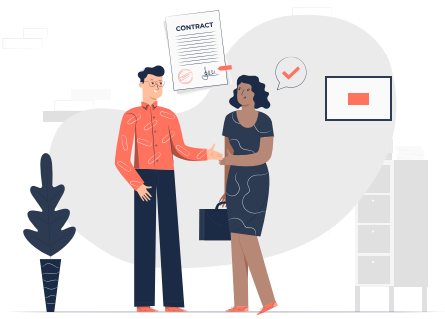
“It's too expensive.” The old Diogo would have discounted. Instead: “Fair enough, can I ask, is it the budget, or are you not yet sure it'll pay off?” “I'm not sure it'll bring enough clients.” Now the real concern is on the table, and Diogo can reconnect to the outcome (more enquiries, worth many times the fee) rather than slashing his price. The objection wasn't about money; it was a question about value, and he answered it.

An objection is a question about value, not a rejection. Don't cave and don't push, get curious, uncover the real hesitation, and answer that while reconnecting to the outcome. Handled with calm curiosity, the objection is where the sale is actually won.

THE RIGHT NEXT STEP

Closing is just the next step

"Closing" scares freelancers because they picture pushy, manipulative sales tactics. Real closing is nothing like that. It's simply **agreeing the next step** with a client who, thanks to the earlier steps, already sees the value. No pressure, no tricks, just proposing the logical way forward and confirming they're happy to take it. If the discovery and the bridge were done well, the close is the most natural part of the whole conversation.



WHAT IT IS

Closing means **reaching agreement on a concrete next step**, not necessarily a signed contract today. Depending on where the conversation is, the right next step might be sending a proposal, starting a small paid trial, booking a follow-up, or, yes, agreeing to begin. The skill is choosing the next step that fits how ready the client is, and inviting them to take it clearly and without pressure. A "yes" to the right small step is a successful close.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

The hard-sell "close today or lose it" mindset backfires with the relationship-based work freelancers do: it creates pressure, erodes trust, and pushes clients who need to think into a defensive no. Reframing the close as "agree the next step" removes the pressure for both of you and keeps momentum, which is what actually leads to won work. It also meets clients where they are: a not-yet-ready client can still say yes to a call or a proposal, so the conversation moves forward instead of dying at a forced decision.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two errors. Applying pressure, pushing for a yes today, using urgency or guilt, which damages trust and backfires in relationship work. And the opposite: doing all the hard understanding work and then failing to propose any next step, leaving the conversation to fizzle out. Also asking for too big a commitment too soon, requesting a signature from a client who'd happily have said yes to a smaller step.

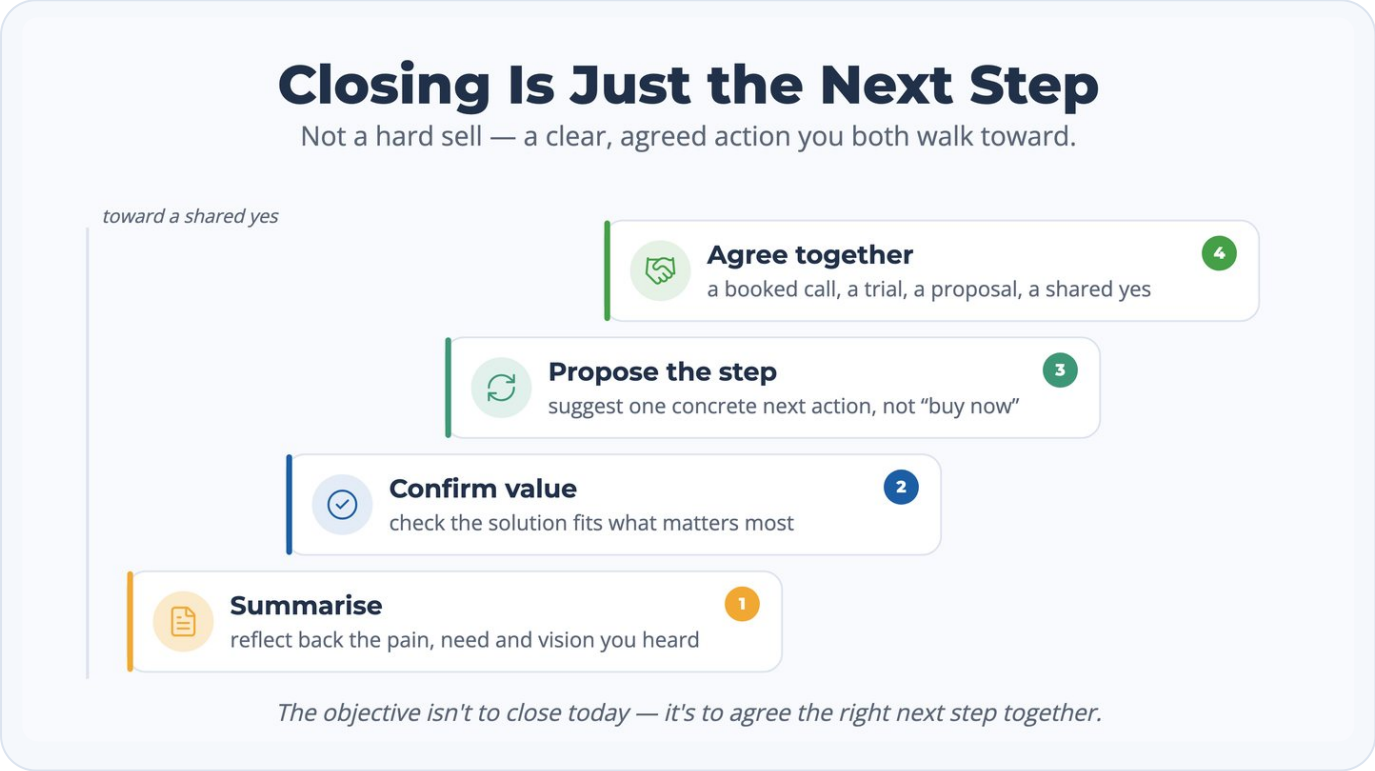
The objective isn't to close today, it's to agree the right next step together.

THE RIGHT NEXT STEP

Closing is just the next step

HOW IT WORKS

When the recommendation has landed, propose a specific, appropriately-sized next step: “shall I put this in a short proposal?”, “want to start with a small first piece?”, “shall we book a call to finalise?” Match it to their readiness, don't ask for a big commitment from someone still deciding. Then simply check they're happy to proceed, and confirm who does what by when. Keep it calm and collaborative; you're agreeing a direction together, not extracting a signature.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

After building the bridge, Nuno doesn't ask “so, will you hire me?” She says, “How about I send a short proposal by Thursday, and we talk it through Friday?” Easy yes. That agreed next step keeps everything moving, and the proposal-plus-call closes the actual work a week later, with no pressure moment at all, because the “close” was just the natural next step.

Closing isn't pressure, it's agreeing the right next step together, sized to how ready the client is. Do the earlier steps well and the close is natural: propose the logical next move, confirm they're happy, and keep the relationship moving forward.

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

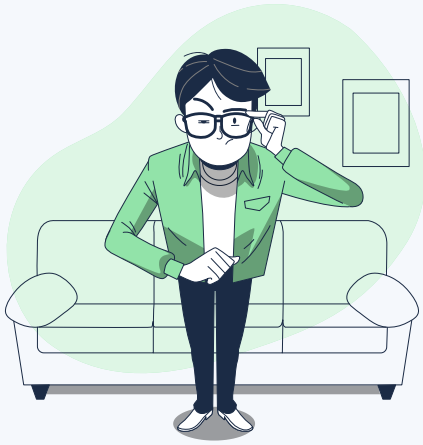
Did I understand before I recommended? Where did I talk when I should have asked?

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

"Personal branding" makes many freelancers cringe, it sounds like self-promotion and pretence. But a personal brand is really just the clear, consistent impression you leave: what people think of, and say about you, when your name comes up. Built honestly on your actual strengths and values, it's not a performance; it's how you become the obvious choice for the right work, instead of a forgettable option among many.



WHAT IT IS

A personal brand is the **consistent impression** people hold of you and your work, your reputation, distilled. A useful freelancer brand answers, quickly and clearly: *what do you do, who for, and what makes you different?* It's built from three honest ingredients, your **strengths** (what you're genuinely good at), your **values** (what you stand for), and your **audience** (who you're for), expressed consistently across everything people see, so the impression is clear rather than muddled.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Clients hire people they remember and trust, and a fuzzy impression is neither. Without a clear brand, you're "a freelancer who does a bit of everything," easy to forget and easy to replace. With one, you become "the person who does X for Y," the obvious call when that need arises. A clear brand also filters: it attracts the clients you want and gently repels the ones you don't, so you spend less time on mismatched work. Being clear beats being loud.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two errors. Trying to be for everyone ("I do everything for anyone"), which makes you memorable to no one. And faking a brand, performing a personality or expertise that isn't yours, which is exhausting and eventually shows. A good brand is narrow and true: clear about what you do and who for, and built on strengths and values you actually have.

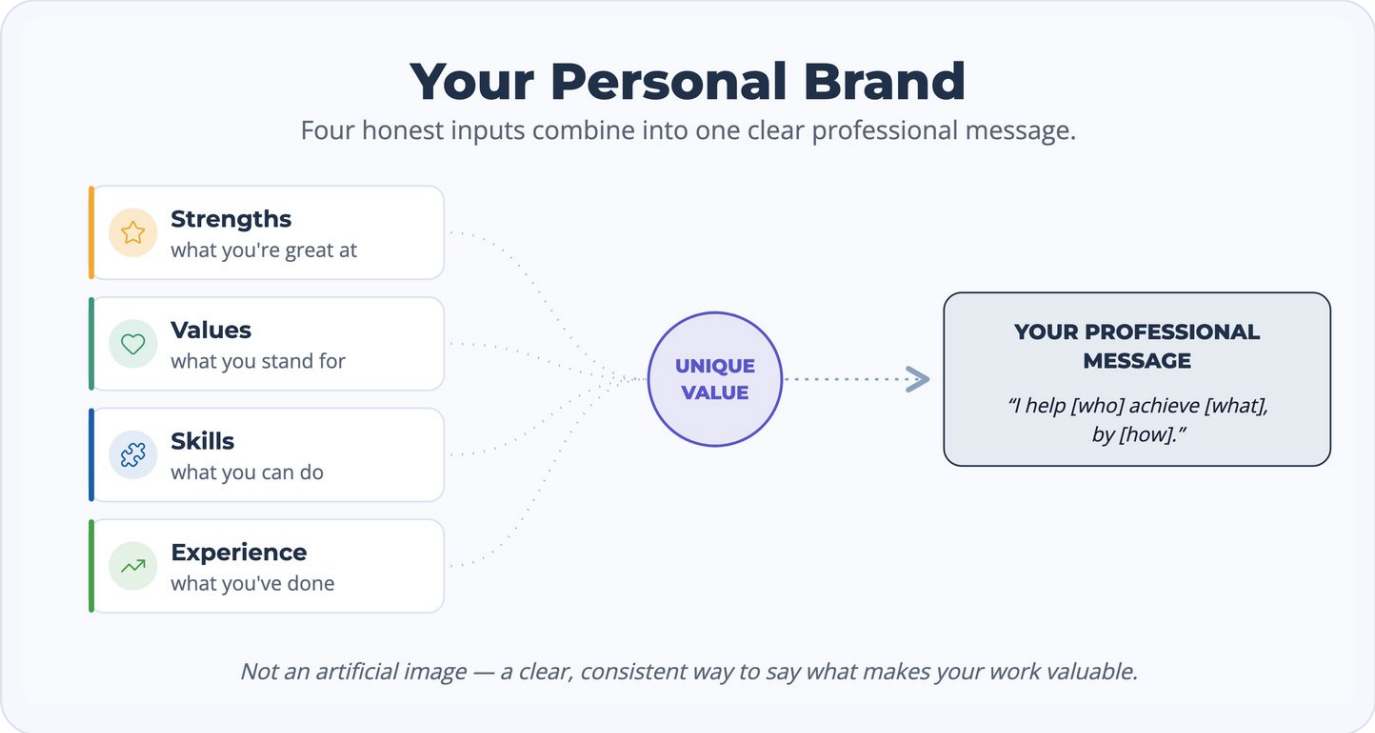
A clear personal brand isn't an act, it's a clear, honest way to say what makes your work valuable.

BE KNOWN FOR SOMETHING

Your personal branding framework

HOW IT WORKS

Start from truth, not tactics. Name your real strengths (what people already praise you for), your values (how you like to work and what you won't compromise), and your ideal audience. Distil them into a simple statement, “I help [audience] to [outcome] through [what you do]”, and then make everything consistent with it: your profile, your samples, how you talk about your work. Consistency is the whole game; the same clear message, everywhere, until it sticks.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Ana called herself “a freelance designer, open to anything”, and got occasional, random, low-paid work. She rebuilt her brand on truth: she's warm, clear, and great at making small businesses look trustworthy. Her new line: “I help local businesses look as professional as they are.” Same person, but now memorable and specific, and she started attracting exactly the clients she wanted.

Your personal brand is the clear, consistent impression you leave, built on your real strengths, values and audience. Make it true, make it specific, and repeat it everywhere. Clarity, not hype, is what gets you remembered and chosen.

SHOW UP WITH A PLAN

A simple content strategy

Most freelancers approach content backwards: they sit down asking “what should I post today?”, run out of ideas, and give up. A content strategy, even a very simple one, flips it: you start with your audience and what they care about, choose a handful of themes you'll consistently show up around, and then let the response guide you. It's not about posting more; it's about posting on purpose, and learning as you go.



WHAT IT IS

A content strategy is a simple, repeatable plan for **what you share, for whom, and why**. At its lightest it's three decisions: **who** you're talking to (your ideal client), **what themes** you'll consistently cover (a few topics tied to your work and their needs), and **how often** you'll show up (a rhythm you can actually sustain). Then a feedback loop: watch what resonates, and let it steer the next round. That's it, no marketing degree required.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Random posting produces random results and burns you out chasing ideas. A strategy makes content sustainable and effective: knowing your audience and themes means you always know what to say, and a steady rhythm builds familiarity and trust over time, which is what turns strangers into clients. The feedback loop means you get better automatically, doing more of what works and less of what doesn't. Consistency plus learning beats bursts of clever, sporadic effort every time.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Starting from “what should I post” instead of “who am I for and what do they need”, which leads to generic, forgettable content and creative burnout. Also chasing volume over consistency (daily posts for a week, then silence), and ignoring the feedback, posting into the void without noticing what actually lands. Sustainable and audience-first beats frequent and random.

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

SHOW UP WITH A PLAN

A simple content strategy

HOW IT WORKS

Decide three things and start small. One, who you're for (your ideal client, be specific). Two, three or four themes you can talk about endlessly, tied to their problems and your expertise. Three, a rhythm you can keep, once a week beats daily-then-nothing. Then post, and watch: which topics get responses, questions, saves? Do more of those, drop the flops. Review lightly every month. The strategy improves itself if you pay attention.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Miguel used to post whenever, and rarely. He picked his audience (small café and shop owners), three themes (simple branding tips, before/afters, local business stories), and one post a week. Within months the before/afters clearly outperformed, so he did more. The steady, focused presence, not volume, brought him three clients who'd been quietly following along.

A content strategy doesn't have to be complicated: know your audience, pick a few themes, choose a rhythm you can keep, and let the response guide you. Start with who you're for, not what to post.

YOUR SHOPFRONT ONLINE

LinkedIn profile & outreach

Long before a client emails you, they look you up, and for professional work, that usually means LinkedIn. Most freelancers waste that moment with a profile that reads like a CV: a list of past jobs that says nothing about how they help clients today. This sub-chapter treats your profile as what it really is, a shopfront, and pairs it with outreach that's genuinely human, because online is where trust now begins.



WHAT IT IS

This has two parts. Your **profile**: the page people find when they look you up, which should work like a shopfront, an instantly clear headline (who you help + how), a top section that sells your value not just your history, visible proof (work, results, recommendations), and an easy way to contact you. And **outreach**: proactively reaching relevant people with **personal, genuine messages**, a real reason you're contacting them, rather than mass copy-paste pitches. Profile builds trust passively; outreach starts conversations actively.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because the profile is doing the talking when you're not there. A CV-style profile makes a visitor work to understand your value, and most won't bother, they leave. A shopfront profile converts that look-up into interest and contact. Outreach matters because waiting to be found is slow; reaching out multiplies your chances, but only if it's human, generic pitches are deleted on sight, while a personal message that shows you actually looked at them earns a reply. Together they turn “being online” into actual clients.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

A profile that's a CV (job titles and dates, no clear value), no proof, and a hidden or missing way to contact you. On outreach: blasting identical copy-paste pitches to everyone, which reads as spam and gets ignored, or being so afraid of “selling” that you never reach out at all. The fix for both is the same: be clear, show proof, and be genuinely human.

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

YOUR SHOPFRONT ONLINE

LinkedIn profile & outreach

HOW IT WORKS

For the profile: rewrite your headline as who you help and how (not your job title); make the top lines sell your value; add real proof (samples, results, a recommendation or two); and make contact obvious. For outreach: pick people you can genuinely help, and write to each like a human, reference something specific about them, say why you're reaching out, and make a small, low-pressure ask. Quality over quantity: ten personal messages beat a hundred copy-pasted ones.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Sofia's headline read “Freelancer | Graphic Designer.” She changed it to “I help small brands look trustworthy, logos, websites, and brand refreshes.” She added three samples and a client recommendation. Then she messaged ten local business owners, each personally (“loved your new café, noticed your menu design, here's a thought…”). Two replied, one became a client, from a profile and ten human messages.

Online is where clients meet you first. Make your profile a shopfront, clear on who you help, backed by proof and easy to contact, then reach out with genuinely personal messages.

POST ON PURPOSE

Practical social media marketing

Social media overwhelms freelancers because they think it means being everywhere, all the time, chasing virality. Practical social media is the opposite: a small, sustainable loop on one or two platforms where your clients actually are. You post with a purpose, observe what resonates, do more of that, and improve, treating the whole thing as a feedback machine that quietly teaches you about your audience while building familiarity and trust.



WHAT IT IS

Practical social media marketing is a simple, repeatable **loop**: **observe** (what does your audience respond to?), **create** (make content around that, and around your work), **publish** (consistently, on one or two chosen platforms), **measure** (what landed?), and **learn** (do more of what works). It's not about volume, virality, or being on every platform. It's about showing up with purpose where your clients are, and getting steadily better by paying attention to the response.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

For a freelancer, social media's real value isn't going viral, it's familiarity and trust: people buy from those they've seen show up consistently and helpfully. Trying to be everywhere spreads you too thin to be good anywhere, and posting without observing wastes the effort. The loop fixes both: one or two platforms keeps it sustainable, and the observe-and-improve cycle means your content gets better automatically. Steady, purposeful presence beats sporadic attempts to “blow up” every time.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Trying to be on every platform at once (and sustaining none), chasing virality instead of consistency, and broadcasting without ever looking at what worked. Also posting only polished “finished” content when process and personality often connect more. The freelancer win isn't a viral hit; it's steady, purposeful presence in one or two right places, improved by watching the response.

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

POST ON PURPOSE

Practical social media marketing

HOW IT WORKS

Pick one or two platforms where your ideal clients actually spend time, ignore the rest. Post with purpose: show your work, your process, your thinking, things that demonstrate your value, on a rhythm you can sustain. Then observe: which posts got saves, comments, enquiries? Do more of those, quietly drop the rest. Keep the loop turning, observe, create, publish, measure, learn, and let it teach you what your audience wants. Sustainable beats spectacular.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Léa tried to be on five platforms and burned out. She cut to one, Instagram, where her craft clients hang out, and posted her process twice a week. She watched: short “making-of” clips far outperformed finished shots, so she made more. Six months of steady, purposeful posting, no viral moment, brought a stream of enquiries from people who'd watched her work and felt they knew her.

Practical social media is a sustainable loop, not a popularity contest: pick one or two platforms where your clients are, post with purpose, and let the response teach you what to do more of. Consistency and learning beat virality.

PROOF THAT OPENS DOORS

A simple no-code portfolio

Many freelancers put off having a portfolio because they think it means building a whole website, which means coding, or money, or both. It doesn't. No-code tools now let anyone assemble a clean, professional one-page portfolio in an afternoon, for free. And a portfolio matters more than almost anything else you'll make, because it's **proof**: the concrete evidence that turns a curious prospect into a client. Simple, live, and real beats elaborate and imaginary.



WHAT IT IS

A portfolio is a simple page (or short site) that shows, at minimum, **who you are, what you can do, examples of your work, and how to contact you**. "No-code" means you build it with drag-and-drop tools, Carrd, Notion, a Canva site, and others, with no programming and usually no cost. It doesn't need to be fancy or large; one clean, clear page with a few real examples and an obvious contact route does the job. Its purpose is singular: to prove you can do what you say.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Proof is the most persuasive thing you have. Clients are wary of claims, everyone says they're good, but a few examples of real work settle the question instantly. Without a portfolio, you're asking people to take your word for it, and many won't. With one, you can point to evidence, which shortens the path from interest to hiring. And because no-code makes it free and fast, not having one is purely a matter of not starting, an easy, high-value gap to close.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Waiting until you can build the "perfect" full website, so you end up with nothing to show, which is far worse than a simple page. Also cramming in everything you've ever done (dilutes your best work, show a curated few), or making the contact route unclear. And thinking you need coding skills or money, you don't. The only real mistake is not shipping a simple one.

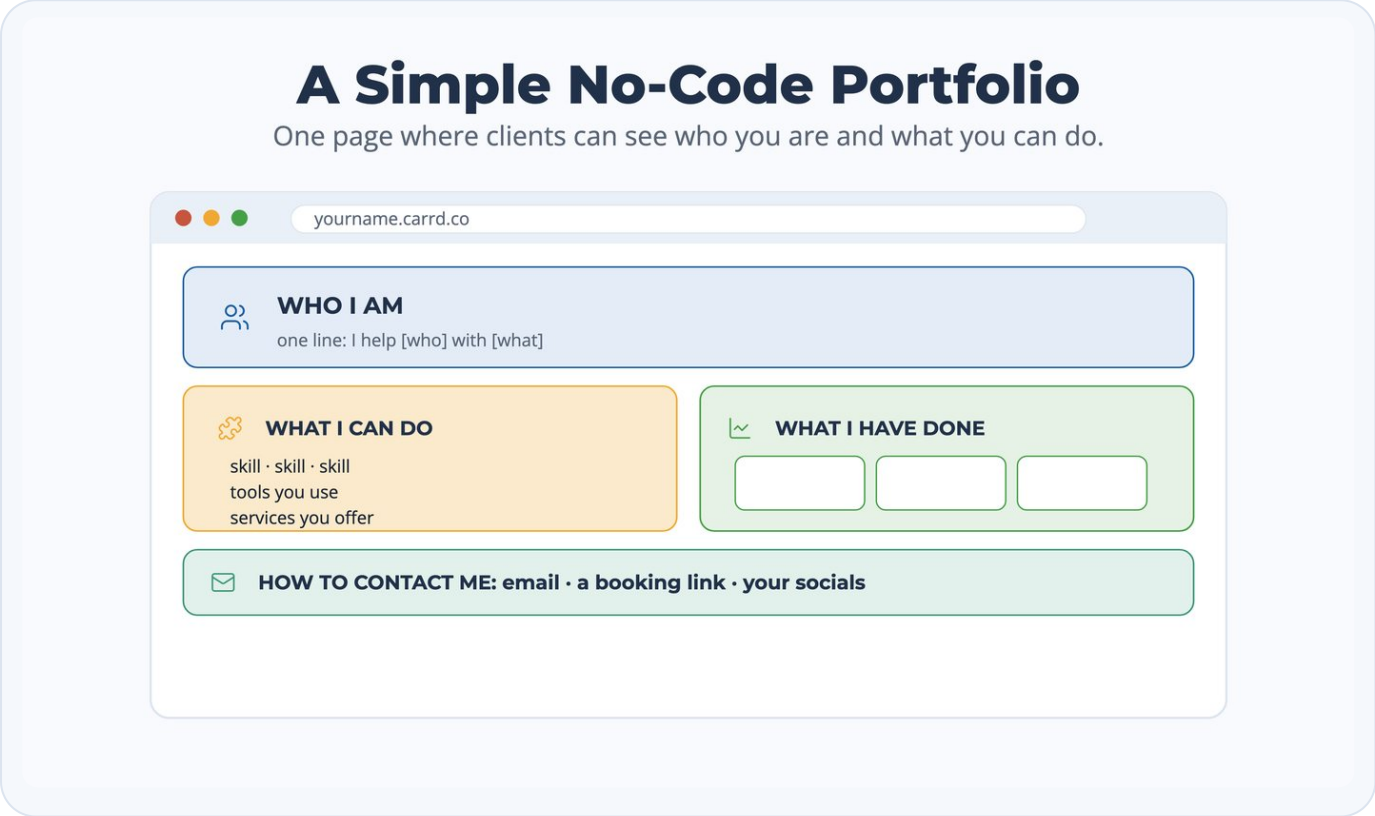
One simple page that shows who you are and what you can do is proof, and proof opens doors.

PROOF THAT OPENS DOORS

A simple no-code portfolio

HOW IT WORKS

Pick a free no-code tool (Carrd and Notion are great for a single page). Include four things: a short line on who you are and who you help, a few of your best real examples (quality over quantity), a sentence or two of proof or testimonial if you have it, and a clear way to contact you. Keep it to one clean page. Don't polish forever, get it live, then improve it. A simple portfolio online today beats a perfect one that never ships.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Tomás kept saying he'd “build a proper site someday” and had nothing to show prospects. In one afternoon he made a free Carrd page: a line about who he helps, six of his best photos, one client quote, and his email. It cost nothing and took hours, not weeks, and within a month he'd sent it to three leads and landed one. Proof, finally, beat promises.

A portfolio is proof, and proof opens doors. You don't need code or money, just a free no-code tool and an afternoon to make one clean page showing who you are, your best work, and how to reach you. Live and simple beats perfect and imaginary.

FAST DRAFTS, YOUR VOICE

AI content-generation tools

AI content tools are a real gift to time-poor freelancers: they can produce a first draft of almost anything in seconds. But they come with an equally real trap, treating the draft as finished. AI is a fast, tireless assistant, not the author of your work. Used well, it removes the terror of the blank page and speeds you up enormously; used blindly, it floods the world with generic, sometimes wrong, voiceless text. This sub-chapter is about using it well.



WHAT IT IS

AI content-generation tools (like ChatGPT and similar) produce written drafts, posts, emails, outlines, captions, from your instructions. The useful way to think of them is as an **assistant that drafts, while you remain the author**. The workflow is a loop: **prompt** clearly (tell it what you want, for whom, in what tone), **generate**, **judge** the result honestly (is it accurate? does it sound like you?), **improve** it (edit, rewrite, add your voice), and only then **use** it. The tool accelerates; you stay in charge.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Two reasons to get this right. The upside: AI removes the blank-page paralysis and does the slow first-draft work in seconds, freeing your time for the parts that need you. The risk: raw AI output is often generic, occasionally factually wrong, and always in a bland, non-you voice, publish it unchanged and you sound like everyone else (or worse, spread an error). The value isn't in the generating; it's in your prompting, judgement and editing. AI makes a good freelancer faster, and a careless one forgettable.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Publishing AI output unchanged, generic, voiceless, and sometimes factually wrong, which makes you sound like everyone else and can spread errors. The opposite mistake is refusing to use it at all and doing slow first-draft work by hand. Also giving lazy, vague prompts and blaming the tool for bland results. The rule: AI drafts, you judge, edit and own, always.

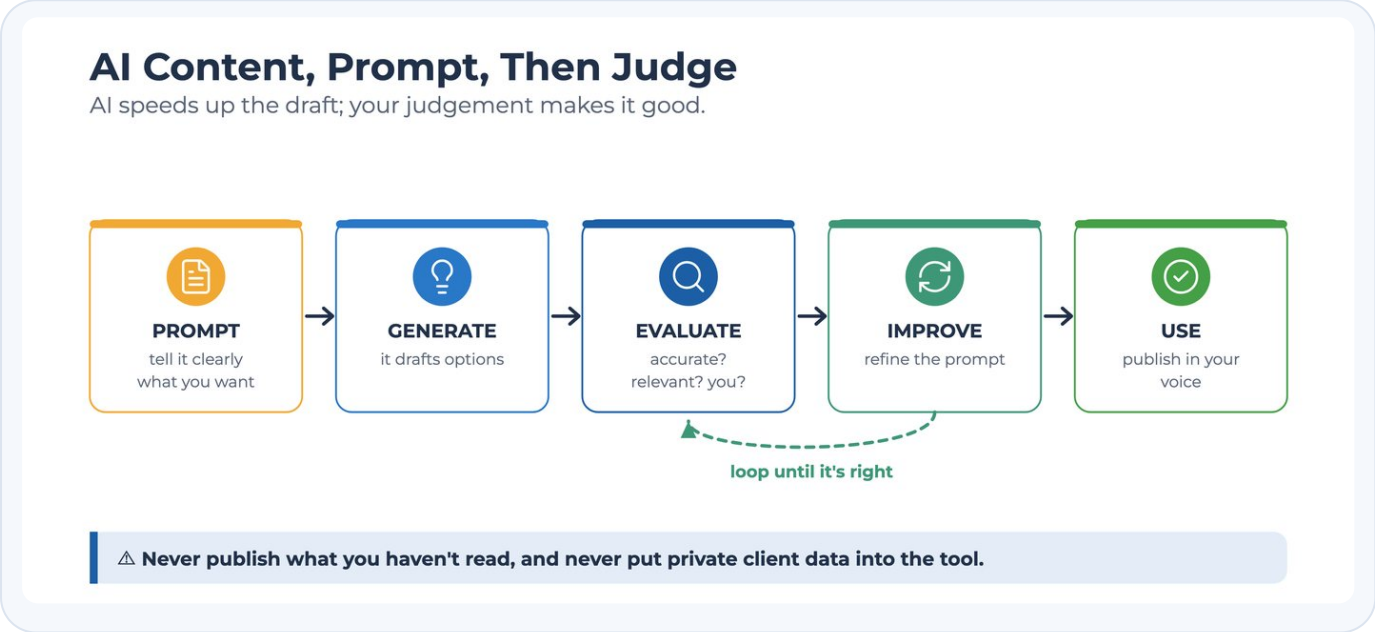
AI drafts fast, but you decide. Prompt clearly, judge honestly, and publish only in your own voice.

FAST DRAFTS, YOUR VOICE

AI content-generation tools

HOW IT WORKS

Use the loop. Prompt clearly, tell it the topic, the audience, the tone, and any key points (vague prompts give vague results). Generate a draft. Then judge it honestly: check facts, and ask “does this sound like me?” Improve it, cut the fluff, fix errors, rewrite in your own voice, add your specific insight. Only then publish. Treat every AI output as a rough first draft from a keen intern: helpful, fast, and never to be sent out unchecked.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Facing a week of content, Rita asks AI to draft five post ideas and a first version of each. In minutes she has raw material, most of it generic. She keeps three ideas, rewrites them in her warm, specific voice, fixes a wrong claim it invented, and adds a real client story. What would've taken a day takes an hour, and it still sounds entirely like her, because she stayed the author.

AI is a fast assistant, not the author. Prompt it clearly, judge the draft honestly (it's often generic or wrong), and rewrite it into your own voice before it goes out. Let AI start you faster, never let it publish for you.

SPEAK TO ONE PERSON

Your ideal-client avatar

It feels safer to aim your message at “anyone who might hire me”, but casting the widest net actually catches the least: a message for everyone speaks to no one in particular, and blurs into noise. The ideal-client avatar is the fix, a vivid, specific picture of the one client you most want to serve. Once you can picture that person clearly, everything you make, your content, your profile, your pitch, gets sharper, more relevant, and more magnetic to exactly the people you want.



WHAT IT IS

An ideal-client avatar is a **detailed, single portrait of your perfect client**, treated almost like a real person. It captures who they are and what matters for reaching them: their **situation**, their **problem/pain**, what they **want**, their **behaviour** (how they decide, what they worry about), **where** they spend time (so you know where to show up), and the **words** they use for their problem. It's one focused person, not a broad demographic, so that everything you create can speak directly to them.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Specificity is what makes communication land. When you speak to a clearly-pictured individual, your message becomes concrete and relevant, and relevance is what makes someone stop and think “that's me.” Aiming at “everyone” forces you into vague, generic language that no one feels spoken to by. The avatar also guides practical choices, which platform, what tone, which pain to lead with, because you know exactly who you're trying to reach. Counter-intuitively, narrowing your focus widens your appeal.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Refusing to narrow, insisting on targeting “everyone” for fear of missing out, which produces vague messaging that attracts no one. Also building an avatar from fantasy rather than real, enjoyable clients, or making it a lifeless demographic (“25–45, urban”) instead of a specific person with a real problem and real words. Vague and universal loses to specific and human every time.

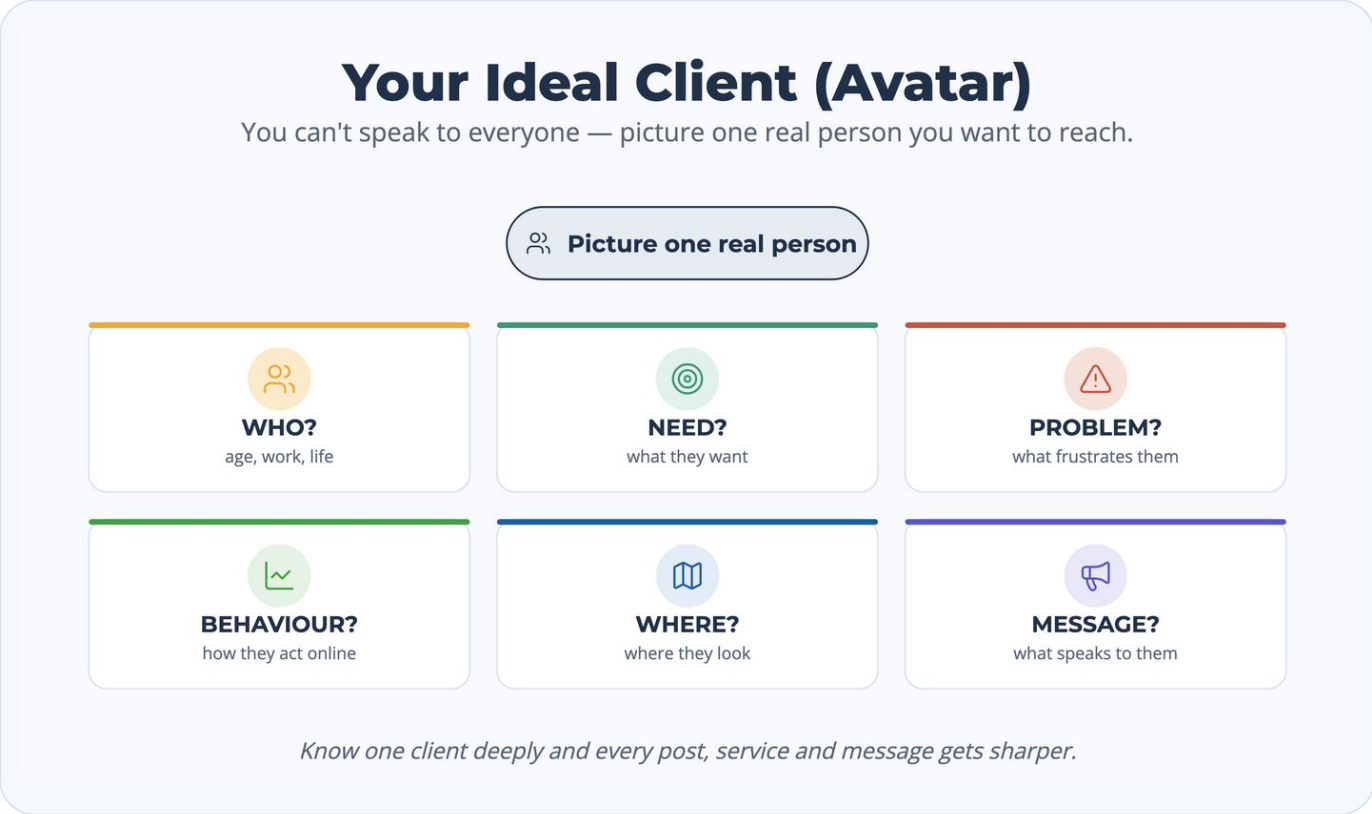
You can't reach everyone at once. Picture one ideal client, and speak clearly to them.

SPEAK TO ONE PERSON

Your ideal-client avatar

HOW IT WORKS

Build one detailed avatar of the client you most want more of. Give them a situation, a specific problem in their own words, a desired outcome, and habits, especially where they spend time and how they choose. Base it on real clients you've enjoyed, not a fantasy. Then use it as a filter for everything: write your content and pitches *to* that person, choose platforms where they actually are, and lead with the pain they actually feel. When in doubt, ask "would my avatar care about this?"



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Diogo tried to appeal to "any business needing design" and his message was bland. He built one avatar: "Marta, runs a small café, proud of her food but embarrassed her branding looks cheap, scrolls Instagram at night, worried about wasting money." Suddenly he knew exactly what to say, where, and how. His content started speaking straight to the Martas of the world, and they started getting in touch.

You can't speak to everyone at once. Build a vivid picture of one ideal client, their situation, problem, wants and words, and speak directly to them. Narrow your focus and your appeal grows.

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?

The first barrier for many young freelancers isn't skill, it's identity: “entrepreneur” feels like a word for other people, more confident, more business-minded, not someone like them. This sub-chapter dismantles that. Entrepreneurship isn't a fixed personality; it's a set of resources, initiative, problem-solving, resourcefulness, you can recognise in yourself and grow. The Ikigai framework gives a gentle way in, mapping where your passion, skill, the world's needs and income can overlap.



WHAT IT IS

Two ideas sit together here. First, that being an **entrepreneur is about resources, not identity**, the mindsets and behaviours (taking initiative, spotting opportunities, solving problems, finding clients) you can develop, not a personality you either have or don't. Second, **Ikigai**, a Japanese idea mapping four overlapping circles: what you **love**, what you're **good at**, what the **world needs**, and what you can be **paid for**. Where all four meet is a personal direction that's both meaningful and financially viable.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because the identity barrier stops people before they start. If “entrepreneur” feels like someone else, you never claim the initiative that goes with it, even when you already act entrepreneurially every day. Reframing it as recognisable, buildable resources shrinks that gap. And Ikigai matters because passion alone doesn't pay and money alone doesn't fulfil, the overlap of all four circles is where a freelancer builds work that lasts because it's both wanted and worth doing. Together they turn “could I?” into “I already am, and here's my direction.”

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Waiting to “feel like an entrepreneur” before acting like one, the feeling follows the doing, not the other way round. Also treating Ikigai as only passion (“do what you love”) and ignoring the world-needs and income circles, which leads to meaningful work that doesn't sustain you, or forgetting love and skill and chasing only money, which pays but drains you. The overlap of all four is the point.

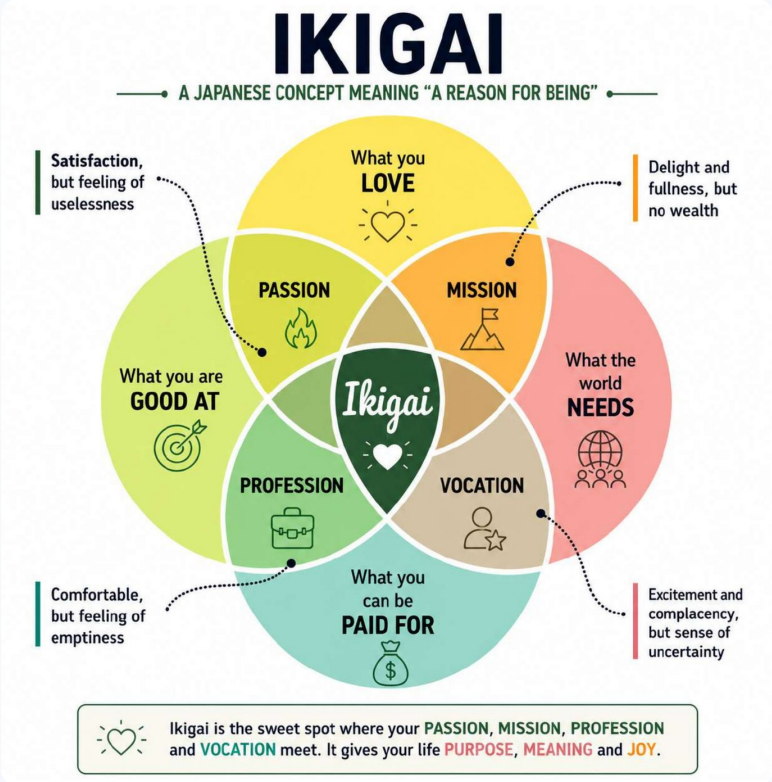
You may already hold entrepreneurial resources without using the word. Recognising them shrinks the distance to “entrepreneur.”

RECOGNISE WHAT YOU ALREADY HAVE

Am I an entrepreneur?

HOW IT WORKS

Map your own Ikigai honestly. List what you love, what you're genuinely good at, what people around you actually need, and what someone will pay for. Look for overlaps, especially the centre where all four meet, that's a strong direction. Then notice the entrepreneurial resources you already use (times you took initiative, solved a problem, found a client) and name them as evidence. The goal isn't to become someone new; it's to recognise and build on who you already are.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Léa loved crafts and was good at them, but didn't feel like "an entrepreneur." Mapping her Ikigai, she saw people needed affordable, personal handmade gifts (a need) they'd happily pay for (income), meeting her love and skill. And looking back, she'd already found customers, priced work and solved problems, entrepreneurial resources she simply hadn't named. The word stopped feeling foreign; she was one already, with a direction.

Entrepreneurship is a set of resources you can recognise and build, not a personality you lack. Map your Ikigai to find where love, skill, need and income overlap, and name what you already do.

LEARN ALONGSIDE OTHERS

Peer learning & accountability

Freelancing is lonely, and the usual advice, “network!”, often makes it worse, sending people to collect contacts they never really use. This sub-chapter reframes support around what actually helps: a small learning circle of genuine peers who learn alongside you and hold you accountable. It's not about knowing important people; it's about a few real relationships where you share problems, swap what works, and answer to each other, which is what keeps a solo worker growing and moving.



WHAT IT IS

Peer learning and accountability means building a **small circle of genuine peers**, other freelancers or makers at a similar stage, who **learn together and hold each other accountable**. Instead of a large, shallow network, you cultivate a few real relationships where you can be honest about struggles, share what you're learning, and commit to each other about what you'll do next. The accountability part is key: telling a peer your plan, and reporting back, turns intention into action.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Solo workers stall in two ways: they get stuck on problems others have already solved, and they let their own goals slide with no one watching. A learning circle fixes both. Peers share hard-won lessons, so you learn faster than alone, and mutual accountability means your commitments actually happen, because someone will ask. Crucially, this comes from a few real relationships, not a big network; depth beats breadth. Reframing “support” this way makes it accessible to anyone, you don't need connections, just a handful of honest peers.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Chasing a big network of impressive contacts you never really engage, instead of building a few real relationships, or seeking a single powerful mentor to save you, when peers at your own stage are more available and often more useful. Also joining a circle to take without giving, mutual accountability only works if you show up for others too. Depth and reciprocity, not status and scale.

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

LEARN ALONGSIDE OTHERS

Peer learning & accountability

HOW IT WORKS

Find two to four peers at a similar stage, people you can be real with, and set a simple rhythm: a regular check-in (even a monthly call) where you each share a struggle, a lesson, and a commitment for next time. Then follow up, ask how the last commitment went. Keep it small and genuine; this isn't networking, it's a support circle. Give as much as you get: the value comes from mutual honesty and follow-through, not from anyone's status.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Tomás felt isolated and kept abandoning his own plans. He started a monthly call with three other freelancers he'd met online. Each shares one problem, one lesson, one commitment, and they check in next time. Within months he's solved problems faster (someone always has), and actually finished things, because he had to report back. No famous mentor, just four honest peers, changed everything.

You don't have to grow alone, and you don't need a big network. Build a small circle of genuine peers who learn together, hold each other accountable, and show up for one another.

EVERYONE STARTS SOMEWHERE

Psychological safety & belonging

Entrepreneurship asks people to risk, to try, to look foolish, to put themselves forward, and no one does that where they don't feel safe. This sub-chapter is about the precondition for everything else in the module: psychological safety and belonging. Using the image of a participation ladder (from watching, to joining in, to leading), it shows that people enter at different rungs, and that the real work of a facilitator or community is to make the next step up feel safe enough to actually take.



WHAT IT IS

Psychological safety is the sense that you can speak, ask, try and fail without being judged or shamed; **belonging** is feeling you're genuinely part of the group. The **participation ladder** pictures engagement as rungs: at the bottom, quietly observing; then contributing a little; then actively participating; up to leading. The key ideas: people **enter at different rungs** (no rung is wrong), and movement up happens only when the next step feels **safe**. Belonging is the ground the whole ladder stands on.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because courage is downstream of safety. In an unsafe space, people stay silent, don't ask the "stupid" question, don't volunteer, don't risk the idea, so no learning or entrepreneurial behaviour happens. Recognising that people start on different rungs stops us pushing everyone to "lead" at once, which just scares the watchers back down. And making the next step feel safe, rather than demanding a leap, is what actually moves people up. For facilitators especially, building belonging isn't soft; it's the enabling condition for every other skill in this toolkit.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Assuming everyone is, or should be, on the same rung, and pushing quiet people straight to "lead", which feels unsafe and sends them back to silence. Also treating belonging as a fluffy nice-to-have rather than the precondition for risk-taking. And forgetting that safety is built by the facilitator's behaviour, mock one person's question and the whole room climbs down. Meet people where they are, and make the next step safe.

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

EVERYONE STARTS SOMEWHERE

Psychological safety & belonging

HOW IT WORKS

First, build safety: welcome every contribution, normalise not-knowing and mistakes, and never let anyone be mocked. Then meet people where they are, notice each person's rung and invite, don't force, the next small step (a watcher shares one word; a contributor leads one small thing). Make stepping up low-stakes and celebrated. As a facilitator, model vulnerability yourself. The aim is never to drag someone to the top rung, but to make the very next rung feel safe enough that they choose to climb it.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

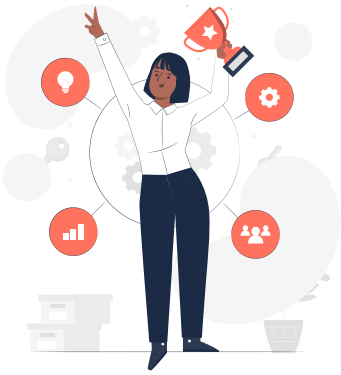
In a workshop, Sofia noticed one participant never spoke, firmly on the “watching” rung. Instead of putting her on the spot, Sofia built safety (praising every contribution, sharing her own mistakes) and offered a tiny next step: “add one word to the board.” She did. Next session she said a sentence; later she led a small task. Not pushed, but made safe, she climbed the ladder at her own pace.

People risk only when they feel safe, belonging is the ground courage grows from. Everyone enters the ladder at a different rung; your job is to make the next step feel safe enough to take.

REAL STORIES, UPS AND DOWNS

Role-model story library

"If they can do it, maybe I can too" is one of the most powerful thoughts a beginner can have, but only if the role model is believable. This sub-chapter is about building a library of real journeys, especially from people "like me", that show the whole path, not a glossy highlight reel. The most useful role-model story includes the setbacks, the doubt, the messy middle, because that's what makes success look survivable and human, rather than magical and out of reach.



WHAT IT IS

A role-model story library is a collection of **real entrepreneurial journeys** used to inspire and normalise, chosen and told with two principles. First, **relatability**: role models who resemble the learner (similar background, start, or circumstances) do far more than distant, famous success stories. Second, **the full arc**: the story must include the **downs as well as the ups**, the setbacks, doubts, and recoveries, not just a triumphant highlight reel. A journey with a real dip in it is the most useful kind.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because highlight reels intimidate as often as they inspire, a flawless success story can make a beginner feel further behind, not closer. A story with a genuine setback does the opposite: it says "struggle is normal, and survivable", exactly the belief a hesitant starter needs. And relatable role models collapse the psychological distance: a distant celebrity is admirable but unreachable; someone a few steps ahead, from a similar place, makes the path feel walkable. The right stories turn "that's not for people like me" into "someone like me did this."

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Reaching only for famous, glossy success stories (distant and intimidating), and telling them as highlight reels that skip the struggle, which quietly signals "real entrepreneurs don't fail", the opposite of the truth. Also assuming any successful person is a good role model, when relatability matters more than fame. Choose the near, the relatable, and the honest, dips included.

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

REAL STORIES, UPS AND DOWNS

Role-model story library

HOW IT WORKS

Curate stories deliberately. Choose role models your learners can identify with, similar background, age, or starting point, over famous-but-distant ones. Tell the whole journey, and don't skip the hard parts: name the setbacks, the moments of doubt, how they got through. Where possible, bring in real, local people a few steps ahead to share honestly. And invite learners to see their own path as a journey with expected dips, not a demand for instant, straight-line success.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Instead of showing a billionaire founder, a facilitator invited a local maker who'd started three years earlier, and asked her to be honest. She spoke about a failed first product, months of doubt, and nearly quitting, before it worked. The room leaned in. That real dip, from someone recognisably "like them", did more for their belief than any polished success story could.

Real stories from people "like me" shrink the distance to entrepreneurship, but only if they show the dips as well as the peaks. Choose relatable role models, and tell the whole journey, setbacks included.

MAKE MORE PEOPLE BELONG

Cultural sensitivity & inclusion

Freelance work is increasingly borderless, your client, collaborator, or community may communicate in ways shaped by a different culture: more or less direct, more or less formal, different senses of time and humour. This sub-chapter treats cultural sensitivity not as a set of rules to memorise but as a compass, a way of staying curious, reading each situation, and adapting your communication with respect. It's both an inclusion skill (making more people feel they belong) and a genuine professional advantage.



WHAT IT IS

Cultural sensitivity is the ability to **notice, respect and adapt to cultural differences** in how people communicate and work, without stereotyping. The "compass" framing matters: rather than a fixed rulebook ("in country X, always do Y"), it's an orientation, stay curious, observe, and adjust. It spans things like directness vs. indirectness, formality, attitudes to time, hierarchy, and humour. Applied well, it's a form of **inclusion** (helping people from all backgrounds feel understood and welcome) and a **professional competence** (working effectively across differences).

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because miscommunication across cultures quietly costs freelancers work and relationships, what reads as confident directness to one person feels rude to another; what feels friendly informality to you may seem unprofessional to them. Sensitivity prevents those avoidable frictions. It also widens your world: adapting respectfully means more people, from more places, can comfortably work with you, and feel they belong when they do. In a borderless freelance economy, this is both an ethical stance and a competitive edge, inclusion and professionalism in one skill.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two opposite errors: assuming your own cultural norms are universal (so difference reads as rudeness), and over-correcting into stereotypes (treating a whole culture as a rigid rulebook). Also taking offence at difference rather than staying curious. The compass approach avoids both, observe and adapt to the actual person in front of you, respectfully, rather than assuming or stereotyping.

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

MAKE MORE PEOPLE BELONG

Cultural sensitivity & inclusion

HOW IT WORKS

Lead with curiosity, not assumption. Notice how the other person communicates, their directness, formality, pace, and mirror it respectfully. When unsure, ask rather than guess, and treat any “rule” as a starting hypothesis, not a stereotype. Pay attention to feedback and adjust. Above all, extend the benefit of the doubt: assume difference, not rudeness. The compass isn't about getting every custom perfectly right; it's about staying respectful, observant and adaptable so people feel understood.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Ana, used to warm, informal emails, kept getting short replies from a new international client. Instead of assuming coldness, she noticed his formality and mirrored it, more structured, less chatty. The relationship warmed immediately. She hadn't memorised a rulebook; she'd read the situation and adapted respectfully. The client later said she was “easy to work with”, and referred her onward.

Cultural sensitivity is a compass, not a rulebook: stay curious, read the situation, and adapt your communication with respect. It's both an inclusion skill and a professional edge.

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

Safe group discussion & perspective-taking

Groups often avoid real discussion because it feels like conflict, someone wins, someone loses, someone gets hurt. This sub-chapter offers a safer, richer way: Socratic questioning and perspective-taking, where the aim is understanding, not victory. Instead of debating to win, the group uses gentle open questions to explore each other's views, and treats the conversation as a loop, receive, reflect, refine, re-state, that deepens everyone's thinking without anyone feeling attacked.



WHAT IT IS

This combines two practices. **Socratic questioning**: exploring ideas through open, curious questions ("what leads you to think that?", "what might we be missing?") rather than statements and verdicts. **Perspective-taking**: genuinely trying to see the issue from the other person's view before responding. Together they turn discussion from a contest into a **loop**: you **receive** a view, **reflect** it back to check you understood, **refine** your own thinking, **re-state** it, and go round again, aiming for shared understanding rather than a winner.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because debate-to-win makes groups unsafe, people defend positions, stop listening, and quieter voices withdraw, so the discussion produces heat but little insight. Questions and perspective-taking keep it safe and generative: no one is being attacked, so people stay open, share honestly, and actually change their minds. The loop structure means the conversation builds understanding rather than entrenching sides. For a group learning to take risks and belong, this is how disagreement becomes productive instead of threatening, curiosity replacing point-scoring.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Treating discussion as a debate to win, so people defend rather than explore, and quieter voices go silent. Also asking leading questions that are really disguised verdicts, or "perspective-taking" in name only (pretending to listen while waiting to pounce). And skipping the reflect step, replying to what you assumed they meant rather than what they said. Curiosity must be genuine, and the goal must really be understanding, not victory.

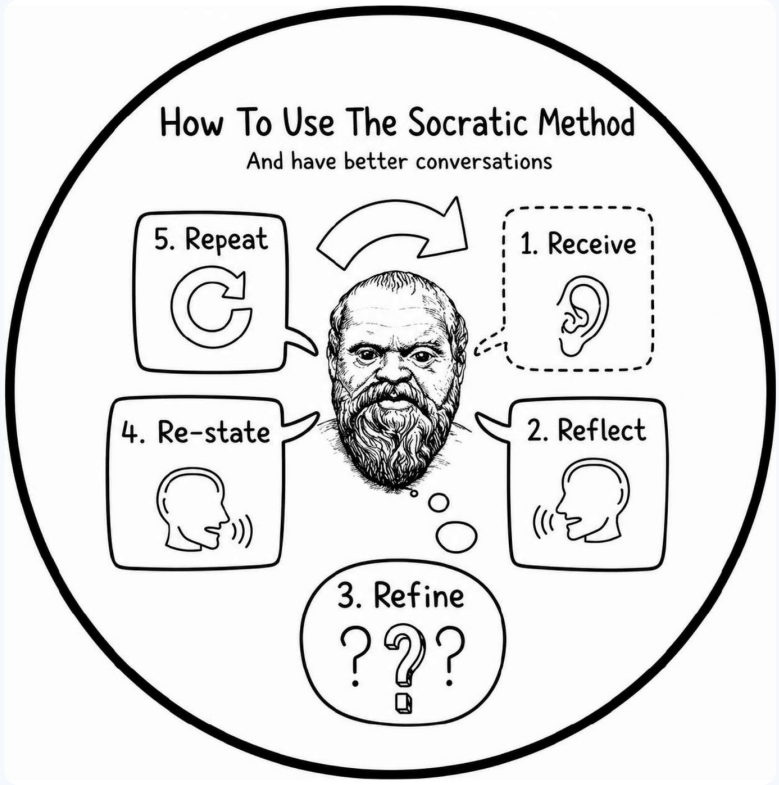
A good conversation is a loop, not a contest: receive, reflect, refine, re-state, and go again.

LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND

Safe group discussion & perspective-taking

HOW IT WORKS

Set the norm that discussion is for understanding, not winning. Favour open questions over statements, especially “what makes you see it that way?” and “what might I be missing?”. Before replying, genuinely take the other's perspective and reflect it back (“so you're saying…?”) to check you've understood. Then refine and re-state your own view, and invite the loop to continue. As facilitator, protect every voice, model curiosity, and never let a discussion become a contest with a loser.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

A group disagreed sharply about pricing. Instead of letting it become an argument, the facilitator asked each side, “what makes that feel right to you?” and had them reflect the other's view back before answering. Tempers cooled, people listened, and both sides refined their thinking. No one “won”, but everyone left with a richer understanding, and the quiet members had spoken, because it felt safe.

Good discussion is a loop, not a contest: receive, reflect, refine, re-state, and go again. Aiming for understanding rather than victory keeps everyone safe and makes disagreement productive.

CONFIDENCE IS BUILT

Confidence in real situations

Many young freelancers hold back, from pitching, pricing, speaking up, because they're "waiting to feel confident." This sub-chapter reframes confidence entirely: it's not an inborn trait or a feeling to wait for, but something you actively build through a simple equation, **preparation + practice + action + reflection**. You prepare, rehearse, act (nerves included), then reflect and adjust, and confidence grows with each loop. The key, liberating truth: you act your way into confidence, you don't wait your way there.



WHAT IT IS

Confidence, here, is treated as a **built capacity, not a fixed trait or a mood**. The equation: **Preparation** (know your stuff, ready yourself) + **Practice** (rehearse in low-stakes settings) + **Action** (actually do it, despite nerves) + **Reflection** (review honestly, learn, adjust). Run that loop and confidence in real situations, pitching, negotiating, presenting, grows each time. Two accompanying truths: confidence comes **after** action, not before it; and **nerves are normal**, confidence is performing well alongside them, not their absence.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because "waiting to feel confident" is a trap that keeps people permanently on the sidelines, the feeling never arrives before the action; it's produced by the action. Understanding confidence as buildable, and nerves as normal, frees people to act now, prepared and practised, rather than waiting forever. Each loop of prepare-practise-act-reflect makes the next real situation easier, so confidence compounds. This is especially vital for freelancers, whose livelihood depends on doing nervous things (selling, pricing, showing up) regularly. Confidence isn't a prerequisite; it's a result.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Waiting to "feel confident" before acting, which guarantees you never start, because the feeling follows the doing. Also mistaking nerves for unreadiness and backing out, when nerves are normal even for the confident. And skipping preparation or practice and then blaming a lack of "natural confidence" for a rough result. Confidence is a loop you run, not a trait you're born with or a mood you await.

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

CONFIDENCE IS BUILT

Confidence in real situations

HOW IT WORKS

Pick a real situation you're avoiding (a pitch, a price conversation, a talk). **Prepare** thoroughly so you know your material. **Practise** it somewhere safe, out loud, with a friend, in the mirror. **Act**, do it for real, accepting that nerves will come and that's fine. Afterwards, **reflect**: what went well, what to adjust? Then repeat with the next situation. Don't wait to feel ready; the readiness is built by moving through the loop, and nerves are a sign you're stretching, not failing.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

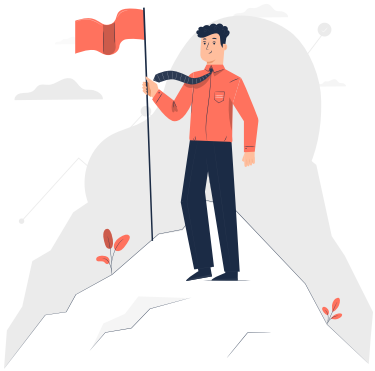
Diogo dreaded pricing calls and kept avoiding them, waiting to feel confident. Instead he ran the loop: prepared his numbers, practised the conversation with a friend, then did a real call, hands shaking. It went okay. He reflected, tweaked, and did another. By the fifth, still a little nervous, he was calm and clear. Confidence hadn't arrived first; the action built it.

Confidence isn't a trait or a feeling to wait for, it's built: preparation + practice + action + reflection, looped. Act before you feel ready, let nerves come, and each loop makes the next situation easier.

DECIDE WITH EYES OPEN

Risk-taking & decision-making

Every entrepreneurial move, taking a big client, buying equipment, going full-time, involves deciding without full information. Beginners often respond in one of two unhelpful ways: freezing (never deciding) or gambling (deciding blindly). This sub-chapter offers the middle path: structured risk-taking. A simple tool, SWOT, gives you a few honest minutes to weigh Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, which won't remove the uncertainty, but turns a scary leap into a calculated, ownable decision.



WHAT IT IS

This is about **making decisions under uncertainty, deliberately rather than blindly**. The tool is **SWOT**: a quick, honest grid of **Strengths** (what's in your favour), **Weaknesses** (what's against you internally), **Opportunities** (external upsides), and **Threats** (external risks) for a specific decision. Laying these out doesn't eliminate risk, entrepreneurship always involves the unknown, but it converts a vague, fearful gamble into a clear-eyed, calculated choice you understand and can stand behind, whatever the outcome.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because the two instinctive responses to risk both fail. Freezing means opportunities pass you by; blind gambling means avoidable mistakes and no learning. A structured look, even a rough SWOT, gives you the benefits of boldness without the recklessness: you see the real upside and downside, spot risks you can reduce, and decide with eyes open. Just as importantly, a decision you've weighed is one you can **own** and **learn from**, win or lose, whereas a blind gamble leaves you no wiser. Structure turns fear into agency.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

The two extremes: freezing (avoiding all risk and missing every opportunity) and gambling (deciding on gut or hope with no honest look at the downside). Also doing a SWOT dishonestly, listing only the flattering points, so it rubber-stamps what you already wanted. And expecting the tool to remove uncertainty; it can't. Its job is to make the risk calculated and ownable, not to guarantee the outcome.

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

DECIDE WITH EYES OPEN

Risk-taking & decision-making

HOW IT WORKS

For a real decision, take a few honest minutes and fill a SWOT grid: your genuine Strengths and Weaknesses for this move, and the Opportunities and Threats around it. Be honest, not optimistic. Then read it: does the upside justify the downside? Can you reduce any threat before deciding? Make the call knowing what you're taking on, and commit to owning and learning from the result, a considered decision, not a blind one.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Facing a big, slightly scary contract, Rita did a five-minute SWOT. Strengths: the skills, some savings. Weakness: she'd be stretched. Opportunity: a flagship client and referrals. Threat: it could crowd out smaller clients. Seeing it laid out, the upside clearly justified the manageable risk, and she spotted a threat she could reduce (staggering the timeline). She said yes, not as a gamble, but as a decision she owned.

Deciding under uncertainty isn't gambling. A few honest minutes of SWOT turn a scary leap into a calculated, ownable decision, faced with eyes open.

FALL, LEARN, CONTINUE

Resilience & learning from failure

Setbacks are guaranteed in freelance life, lost clients, failed projects, dry spells, and how you respond to them matters more than the setbacks themselves. This sub-chapter reframes resilience: not toxic positivity or pretending it doesn't hurt, but a practical process for bouncing back. You pause and acknowledge the hit, understand what actually happened, adjust, and take the next useful step. Handled this way, failure becomes information you learn from, a bend in the road, rather than a verdict on who you are.



WHAT IT IS

Resilience is the **capacity to recover from setbacks and learn from them**, understood here as a **process, not a personality trait**. The loop: **pause** (acknowledge the setback and that it stings, don't deny it), **understand** (honestly work out what happened and why), **adjust** (change your approach based on that), and **take the next step** (act again, wiser). The core reframe: **failure is information, not identity**, something that happened and can teach you, not something you are. Resilience is the bounce, not the absence of the fall.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because setbacks end many freelance careers not through the setback itself but through the response, quitting, spiralling, or pretending nothing happened and repeating the mistake. A resilience process prevents both collapse and denial: pausing honours the real hurt (so it doesn't fester), understanding extracts the lesson (so the setback isn't wasted), and adjusting plus stepping forward keeps you moving. Framing failure as information, not identity, protects your self-belief through the inevitable dips. In a career built on repeated risk, the ability to bounce is what lets you stay in the game long enough to succeed.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Two opposite failures: collapsing (treating a setback as proof you're not good enough, letting it end things) and denying (pretending it didn't hurt or didn't happen, so you learn nothing and repeat it). Also skipping the understand step, bouncing back fast but blind, straight into the same mistake. Resilience needs both honesty about the hurt and honesty about the lesson, then a real adjustment and a next step.

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

FALL, LEARN, CONTINUE

Resilience & learning from failure

HOW IT WORKS

When a setback hits, resist both denial and despair. **Pause**: acknowledge it happened and that it hurts, that's honest, not weak. **Understand**: honestly ask what happened and what you can learn, separating the event from your worth. **Adjust**: decide what you'll do differently. **Take the next step**: act again, applying the lesson. Talk to your peer circle, setbacks feel smaller shared. And keep asking "what does this teach me?" rather than "what does this say about me?"



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Miguel lost his biggest client overnight, and his first thought was "I'm not cut out for this." Instead of spiralling, he ran the process: paused (yes, it hurt), understood (he'd relied too much on one client), adjusted (he'd diversify), and took the next step (reached out to three prospects). Months later he had a broader, safer client base. The failure hadn't defined him; it had taught him.

Setbacks are certain; your response is what counts. Resilience is a loop: pause, understand, adjust, take the next step. Treat failure as information, not identity, and the dips become bends in the road.

SEE YOURSELF AS THE OWNER

Freelancer → director (CEO) mindset

This last sub-chapter names the destination of the whole module: a shift in identity from **freelancer as worker** to **freelancer as director, the CEO of your own professional life**. It's the difference between "I do tasks people give me" and "I decide where my work goes." You don't need employees or a company for this; even as a solo freelancer you already make a director's decisions, prices, clients, direction. Owning that role, seeing yourself as the one steering, is what lets you make bigger, braver, more deliberate choices about your future.



WHAT IT IS

The CEO (or director) mindset is **seeing yourself as the person who directs your professional life, not just the person who does the work**. Picture a shift along a line: from **worker** (executes tasks for others) toward **owner/director** (sets the strategy, chooses the direction, decides the what and why). Practically, it means owning the decisions you already face as a freelancer, what to charge, which clients to take, what to build toward, as a leader's choices rather than things that just happen to you. It's an identity, not a job title.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR YOU

Because how you see yourself shapes what you'll do. If you see yourself as a worker waiting for tasks, you stay reactive, taking what comes, competing on price, letting others set your direction. Seeing yourself as the director of your own career flips that: you start making deliberate choices about direction, standards and growth, the very decisions that build a lasting, self-determined livelihood. This is the true aim of the whole module, not just feeling more confident, but genuinely believing "I can decide my own professional future", and acting on it.

THE COMMON MISTAKE

Staying in the worker identity, waiting for tasks, taking whatever's offered, letting clients or circumstances set your direction and prices, and calling it "just how freelancing is." Also assuming the CEO mindset requires a company, staff, or scale, when it's really about owning the decisions you already make. The mistake is not the lack of a title; it's not stepping into the director's seat that's already yours.

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

SEE YOURSELF AS THE OWNER

Freelancer → director (CEO) mindset

HOW IT WORKS

Start owning the director's decisions you already have. Instead of accepting whatever work arrives, choose your direction: who you want to serve, what you want to be known for, where you want this to go in a year. Set your prices and standards as deliberate policies, not nervous reactions. Regularly step back from doing the work to direct it, review, decide, adjust. And practise the identity: speak and think of yourself as the one steering your career, because you are, whether or not you ever hire anyone.



A WORKED EXAMPLE

For years Marta took whatever design work came and charged whatever was asked, a worker waiting for tasks. The shift came when she started acting as her own director: she chose a niche, set deliberate prices, and decided where she wanted to be in a year. Nothing about being solo changed, but everything about her decisions did. She stopped taking what came and started choosing where it went.

The final shift is identity: from worker who does tasks to director who sets direction. You don't need a company to be the CEO of your career, own the director's decisions you already make.

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

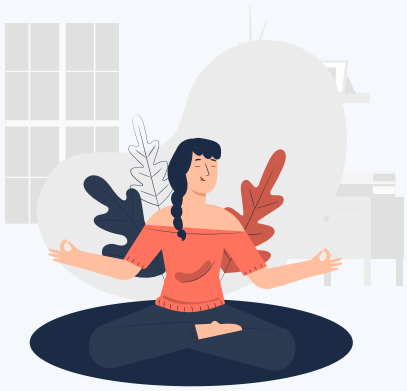
Which inner voice, relationship or condition most changes how you show up?

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

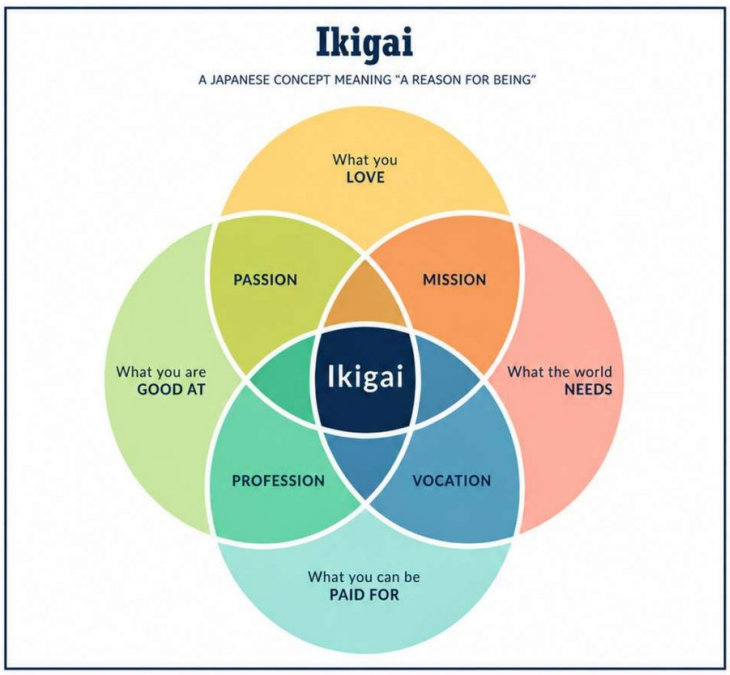
Case study

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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The Freelancer to Startup Toolkit

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Authors: Rajesh Pathak, Riya Raj, Andrej Korpar, Marija Stravinskaite, Petar Rizov

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