WORK AS WE KNOW IT IS **OVER...**

HOW TO **BEAT AI**
EARN MORE
AND **WORK**
FRACTIONALLY

you are the corporation

BY ADAM CORDNER

You Are the Corporation

Pushing Back Against AI
With Fractional Work

and the emergence of

While Collar Tradespeople

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Contents & Navigation

Introduction

"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic."

Peter Drucker

New Zealand. On stage. Mic clipped on. Slides ready. Suit doing its best impression of "competent adult."

I knew the presentation off by heart. I'd done this a hundred times. I was fine. Proper fine.

Until my brain, uninvited, unhelpful, and clearly bored—dropped a single thought into my body like a brick through a window:

"What the actual fuck are you doing up here?"

Not, "You'll forget your lines." Not, "They'll hate this." Not, "You're under-prepared." Just pure existential heckling, perfectly timed, like my internal narrator had waited all day for the spotlight and then decided to clothesline me for sport.

My body did what bodies do when they think a lion has entered the room. Hands went numb. Vision narrowed. Heart started playing a drum solo. Breathing disappeared like it had a prior engagement. On the outside, I'm standing there trying to look like a professional. On the inside, I'm negotiating with my nervous system like it's a hostage situation.

That moment didn't end my career. It did something worse.

It cracked the image I had of my career.

Because up until then I'd played the game the way you're supposed to play it. Build the CV. Collect the logos. Stack the promotions. Learn to say "stakeholders" and "alignment" with a straight face. Chase the $100K club like it was the adult version of a blue ribbon, then pretend it was all very normal and not at all the centrepiece of your self-worth.

And I need to be fair here. I didn't hate corporate life. I loved parts of it. I loved great teams, big wins, being in the mix when something mattered. I loved the craft of helping people buy, solving real problems, watching the needle move because I'd done something genuinely useful.

But after that moment on stage, the whole "professional dream" started to look less like a goal and more like a costume.

Not because I believed I was meant for "more" in the billionaire sense. I wasn't sitting there thinking, I should own a yacht. I was sitting there thinking something far more confronting.

I'm meant for more of what I'm actually good at.

More creating. More building. More momentum. More value. Less theatre. Less presence-for-the-sake-of-presence. Less living inside a calendar that measures activity and calls it achievement.

Not long after, I was kicked out the door from that company. There were whisky sours. There was ice hockey. There was a baby. Which, to be clear, isn't a recommended recovery plan, but it was mine. And in hindsight it was the start of something I didn't know I needed.

At the time I thought the panic attack was the crisis. Years later I realised it was the receipt. It was my nervous system handing me proof that something about the way we work, about the way we attach our identity to work, was off.

Not morally off. Not "burn the system down" off. Just fundamentally misaligned with what work was becoming, and with what I was becoming.

Years later, I met a team—no, a nest—of unbelievably motivated young people. The kind of group that makes you feel both inspired and slightly threatened, like, "Good for you… also please stop."

They weren't corporate climbers. They weren't polishing LinkedIns or obsessing over titles. They weren't waiting for permission, or confidence, or a manager to validate their potential with a performance review.

They were building their own thing.

And what hit me wasn't just their ambition. It was their inevitability. They weren't "trying" to be independent one day. They already were. They didn't have the professional advantages I had, either. No brand-name résumé. No decade of "being in the rooms." No inherited corporate playbook.

They just built anyway. They learned in public. They shipped imperfectly. They got better by doing. They earned because they created value, not because they survived another quarter.

Watching them made something click. The world didn't need more perfect employees. It needed more people who could create value without being told where to sit.

And that's the shift you can feel happening now, even if you can't quite describe it yet.

The employment market is changing. Yes, AI is a wrecking ball, but it's not the only one. Working from home didn't just change where we sit. It changed what companies can justify paying for. It changed what managers can control. It changed the theatre of "presence" as a substitute for value. Entire layers of work, status updates, coordination meetings, reporting, admin, internal comms, follow-ups, are being exposed for what they always were: expensive glue holding together systems that never trusted people to operate like adults.

Once a company realises an AI agent can do the glue work faster, cheaper, and without complaining, the question becomes uncomfortable: what exactly are we paying humans for?

That's not a scare tactic. It's the redefinition.

AI is going to automate a huge amount of the work that padded out corporate days. Not the high judgement work. Not the human trust work. Not the "read the room" work. The filler. The admin. The "busy" work. The work that made people feel employed.

And when that disappears, value becomes painfully visible.

That's one part of the shift. The other part is globalisation coming back with new teeth. Remote work didn't just mean you can work from home. It meant your job can be done from anywhere. Once the location requirement disappears, companies start shopping. Not because they're evil, but because they're businesses. They will optimise for cost and speed the way they always have.

Add a cost of living crisis to that and you get a perfect storm. When life gets expensive, people stop romanticising loyalty. They stop pretending a salary is security. They start doing the math, and the math starts doing emotional damage.

A lot of "professional" jobs are beginning to look uncomfortably similar to factory jobs in the late 90s. Not because the people aren't smart. Because the system is optimizing for efficiency. Outsourcing. Automating. Compressing. Measuring. Replacing.

Machines don't need managers. Cheaper labour doesn't care about your résumé. And AI doesn't flinch when you tell it you've been "with the company" for seven years.

So if your plan is to keep being good and hope the system rewards you, I say this with respect and a small amount of bratty honesty: that plan is adorable.

It's also not a strategy.

This book is my attempt to give you one.

Not a fantasy. Not "quit your job and follow your passion." Not hustle culture with better typography. Something more practical, more grounded, and frankly, more useful.

We're moving into an era where more of us will work like tradespeople, even if we never touch a tool. Outcomes, not hours. Value, not presence. Reputation, not titles. The ability to walk into a room, solve something real, and walk out with leverage.

I call it the white-collar tradie, and I know that phrase will annoy some people. Good. It should. It's meant to cut through the polite language we've used to avoid admitting what's happening. Because this isn't a "trend." It's a reshaping of work itself.

We're already seeing it. Big companies hiring contractors for specialised projects instead of permanent roles. Entire departments turning into rotating pods of specialists. Businesses buying expertise "as needed" rather than carrying it as payroll. The rise of fractional leaders who come in, fix something meaningful, and move on. Even the language is shifting. Companies don't say "we need help." They say "we need outcomes." They don't say "we need a person." They say "we need capability."

The uncomfortable truth is a lot of people will be pushed into this world before they feel ready. This book exists so you can walk into it deliberately, with a plan, instead of being shoved into it while still emotionally attached to your email signature.

There will be moments where your brain does the New Zealand thing again.

Maybe not on a stage, but at two in the morning, staring at the ceiling, asking: what am I doing?

The difference is, by the end of this book, you won't only have a brave answer.

You'll have a practical one.

And hopefully, you'll have more of what you're actually good at—without needing to become a billionaire to prove you deserved it.

Breaking Free from the Corporate Cage

"If you haven't found it yet, keep looking—and don't settle."

Steve Jobs

I didn't hate corporate life.

That's important, because people love a neat little narrative where corporate is the villain and quitting is the happy ending. It makes for a great post. It makes for a terrible understanding of what actually happens to most of us.

Corporate gave me a lot. Skills. Confidence. Big rooms. Big problems. Good people. Proper momentum. I learned how decisions get made, how money moves, how politics hides behind "process," and how entire careers can be built on being the person who always looks calm while everything's on fire.

I wasn't miserable. I wasn't hard done by.

I was just… not me.

Not in the dramatic, "I'm going to burn it all down" way. In the quieter way that's harder to explain. The way you wake up on a Monday already tired. The way you catch yourself speaking in sentences you'd never use with your friends. The way you become weirdly good at nodding, smiling, and agreeing, then leaving the meeting and forgetting what you just agreed to because none of it felt real.

Corporate didn't crush me.

It edited me.

It sanded off the weird edges. The sharp bits. The creative instincts that didn't have a meeting invite. The part of me that sees a new path and wants to sprint down it. The part that wants to build, not maintain. The part that hates doing something "because that's how we do it" and would rather risk failing than succeed in slow motion.

And here's the part that gets anxiety-inducing if you sit with it for more than ten seconds: the cage isn't made of bars. It's made of comfort.

It's salary. It's predictable. It's status. It's the relief your parents feel when you say, "Yeah, it's going well." It's the dopamine hit of being needed. It's the story you can tell people at dinner parties without having to explain yourself.

The cage isn't always cruel.

Sometimes it's cosy.

Which is exactly why people stay in it long after they've outgrown it.

Because leaving a cosy cage makes you look ungrateful. Dramatic. Risky. "Having a moment." And if you're like most high-performing professionals, you've built your entire identity on not being those things.

So you stay. You adjust. You get better at it. You become more professional.

And slowly, you shrink.

Not visibly. Not in a way anyone can point to. You still show up. You still perform. You still get paid. You still progress.

But internally, something starts to itch. The kind of itch that doesn't go away when you take leave. The kind that follows you into weekends. The kind that turns a quiet Sunday afternoon into a low-grade dread because Monday is approaching like a tax bill.

This is where the anxiety creeps in, not because your job is hard, but because the deal is changing and nobody wants to say it out loud.

For decades, the promise went like this: be loyal, be competent, climb the ladder, and you'll get security.

Now the ladder is on wheels.

The definition of "security" is getting thinner. Layoffs happen through an all-hands meeting with the vibe of a funeral and the efficiency of a software update. Remote work didn't just change where we sit—it changed the global pricing of labour.

Cost of living has made even "good salaries" feel like a temporary patch on a permanent leak. And AI has quietly stepped onto the field like a rookie who doesn't get tired, doesn't ask for a raise, and somehow already knows your job better than the guy who trained you.

You can feel it in the air.

That sense that the "professional" world is becoming… less personal. Less human. More transactional. Like a machine that doesn't care how long you've been there, because it doesn't really care about you at all.

If that thought makes your chest tighten a little, good. Not because I want to scare you, but because that's your instincts doing their job.

The market is shifting.

And the worst thing you can do in a shifting market is pretend the ground isn't moving.

What changed everything for me wasn't a single heroic leap. It was what I saw when I started paying attention to the people who were leaving, not to escape, but to build lives that made corporate irrelevant.

I watched a creative agency form out of the most unlikely trio you could imagine: a building site manager, a bank clerk, and an electrician.

Read that again.

Not a slick founder story. Not a curated pedigree. No glossy internships. No "we met at Stanford." Just three people who looked at the traditional path and thought, "Yeah… nah."

And they built something huge. A bleeding-edge cultural agency. Not small. Not cute. Massive. The kind of agency that shapes taste, not just campaigns. They now specialise in music artists and global fashion brands—proper cultural work, where creativity isn't a hobby, it's a weapon.

And they're not going back.

Not because they're bitter. Not because they "couldn't hack it." Not because they hate stability.

Because once you've built something that runs on your judgement, your taste, your ability to create outcomes, and your willingness to learn in public, the idea of returning to permission-based work feels like trying to put toothpaste back in the tube.

I've seen the same energy in a young woman whose drive alone built a top-tier talent agency, one managing some of the world's best-known creators.

And here's what people misunderstand about stories like hers: it's not just ambition. It's not just hustle. It's clarity. It's there wasn't even the thought of getting a job...

She saw the shift early. She understood creators weren't "internet people" messing around for likes. They were media companies. Brands. Commerce engines. Culture. And she built the infrastructure around them while everyone else was still debating whether it counted as a "real career."

She’s not going back either.

She hasn’t even thought about it.

Those examples matter because they reveal something that should be both exciting and slightly terrifying: work is no longer reserved for people with the right badges.

The gatekeepers are weakening.

The system that used to decide who gets to win is being bypassed by people who can deliver outcomes without asking permission.

And that’s where this chapter gets a bit punk-rock, because the “corporate cage” isn’t just a place you work.

It’s a belief system.

It’s the belief that safety is found inside someone else’s structure.

It’s the belief that the highest form of value is being employed.

It’s the belief that your creativity should be saved for weekends, your ambition should be channeled into promotions, and your weird ideas should be kept to yourself until they’re “safe.”

The cage is the part of you that knows you’re capable of more, but keeps choosing familiar because familiar feels responsible.

But familiar is not the same as safe anymore.

That’s the anxiety-inducing truth.

The old deal is fading, whether you’re ready or not.

So breaking free doesn't have to mean quitting tomorrow. It doesn't have to mean burning bridges, blowing up your LinkedIn, or starting a "new chapter" with a photo of you staring at the ocean like you're about to launch a wellness retreat.

Breaking free starts earlier than that.

It starts when you stop asking, "How do I climb in here?"

And start asking, "What would I be worth outside of here?"

That question is uncomfortable because it removes the padding. It removes the brand name, the title, the structure, the built-in credibility. It forces you to face the real thing: your ability to create outcomes.

And that's also why it's the most important question you can ask right now.

Because in this new era, the winners won't be the most obedient employees.

They'll be the people who can make things move.

So if you're feeling that itch (restless, bored, underused, slightly trapped) it might not be because you hate your job.

It might be because you can feel the shift coming, and some part of you is already preparing for life outside the cage.

That's not drama.

That's evolution.

The Matrix moment isn't coming.

It's already here.

The blue pill is staying comfortable, staying titled, staying safe, telling yourself you've got time.
The red pill is accepting that work is changing and choosing to become someone who can create value without being protected by an employer.

No trench coat. No slow-motion kung fu.

Just you, looking at the world honestly, and deciding you'd rather be early than sorry.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about what happens after that decision—what it actually looks like to step out of corporate identity and into independent value without panicking, spiraling, or doing something financially unhinged just to prove you're brave.

You don't need a dramatic exit.

You need a plan.

And yeah, ideally, fewer whisky sours than I had.

ps.

Oh, and if you think this is one of those "it's not for everybody" books, you're wrong.

Not "slightly wrong." Not "depends how you look at it" wrong.

Wrong.

This isn't a lifestyle choice. It's not a personality type. It's not reserved for the brave, the lucky, the hyper-confident, the entrepreneurial, or the people who already own three black turtlenecks and call everything a "venture."

This is the direction the market is moving in, whether you like it or not.

Because what's happening isn't just a few people quitting and becoming freelancers. What's happening is the entire structure of professional work is being reassembled. Slowly at first, then all at once, like it always does.

And the new model looks less like "staff" and more like construction.

Think about how a building actually gets built. There's a project. There's an outcome. There's a timeline. Teams get assembled around the job. Specialists come in, do their part, and move on. Sometimes the same people return for the next project, sometimes they don't. Reputation matters. Delivery matters. Speed matters. Quality matters. Nobody gets paid for "being present." Nobody gets promoted because they were good at replying quickly. You're there because you can do the work.

That's where professional work is heading.

Not because it's poetic. Because it's efficient.

Companies don't want to carry permanent cost if they can buy outcomes on demand. They don't want bloated layers if AI can compress them. They don't want people sitting around waiting for the next quarter's priorities to be "aligned" when they can spin up a team, ship a project, and move.

And once that mindset takes hold, "staff" stops being the default. It becomes the exception.

The scary part isn't that this will happen.

The scary part is that it can happen without anyone announcing it.

It doesn't arrive with a memo titled "Hello team, we will now replace employment." It arrives as a series of small changes that feel harmless on their own. Hiring freezes. More contractors. More vendors. "Temporary" project roles. Smaller teams. Leaner budgets. Faster cycles. And then one day you look around and realise the people still employed aren't the ones doing the work, they’re the ones managing the work being done by everyone else.

And even that layer gets thinner over time.

Because the logic is brutal: if outcomes can be delivered without permanent staff, why keep staff?

So no, this isn’t a book about “one option” for “some people.”

This is a book about reality catching up with the professional class.

You don’t need to love it. You don’t need to romanticise it. You don’t need to pretend it’s freedom and sunsets and working from cafés while wearing linen.

You just need to see it clearly.

Because the people who treat this shift like a niche lifestyle will be the ones blindsided by it.

And the people who treat it like the new baseline will be the ones who stay employed - even when employment, as we’ve known it, starts to disappear.

This is why I called it the white-collar tradie.

Not to be cute. Not to be provocative for the sake of it.

Because that’s the closest mental model we have for what’s coming: specialist teams, assembled to build outcomes, paid for delivery, judged by results, moving from project to project.

You can either wait until the market forces you into that reality…

Or you can start building your ability to thrive in it now, while you still have a salary, a safety net, and time to make smart moves instead of desperate ones.

That’s what this book is really about.

Not quitting.

Not rebelling.

Becoming the kind of person the new world will still pay, even when the old world stops hiring.

From Corner Office to Coffee Shop (or café)

"Being busy is a form of laziness—lazy thinking and indiscriminate action."
Tim Ferriss

Okay. After that little berating of the corporate world, you'd assume I rage-quit in a blaze of glory, flipped a boardroom table, and skateboarded out of the lobby while Rage Against the Machine played in the background.

Nope.

I left after a huge payout of equity and bonuses.

Which is objectively the funniest way to "escape the system," because it's like giving a speech about how capitalism is broken while cashing the cheque with both hands. So yes, I'm aware. Save your moral outrage for someone who didn't pay a mortgage.

But seriously, I left on great terms. No drama. No scorched earth. No "tell them I'm unavailable" energy. It was clean. Respectful. Adult.

Which made it even weirder, because I walked away from something I'd spent years building, and the world didn't collapse. Nobody chased me down the street yelling "Come back!" The building didn't shake. The sky didn't open.

I just… left.

And like every person who leaves a big job, I told myself I was taking time off to "find myself."

Find my why. Find my purpose. Find my inner child. Find my spirit animal. Find whatever else people find when they suddenly have a Tuesday afternoon free and decide they're going to become a philosopher.

And look, some of that matters. I'm not totally dead inside. But there's a special kind of nonsense that comes with that phase too. Because when you've been in corporate long enough, you start treating your life like a brand strategy workshop.

"Who am I?"

"Where do I want to be in five years?"

"What am I optimising for?"

Mate, I'm just trying to remember how to eat lunch without booking it in.

Anyway, while I was off doing my post-corporate soul-searching, I had a café I kept going to. Great joint. Good vibe. The kind of place that makes you forget the concept of "KPIs" exists, which is already healing.

The owner was a guy named Yianni.

And Yianni was in hell.

Not the dramatic, poetic kind of hell. The real one. The kind that doesn't look good on Instagram.

He'd just had a premature baby. COVID was absolutely kneecapping hospitality. The business he'd poured himself into "the dream" was getting slowly strangled by lockdowns, uncertainty, and the brutal math of rent. He wasn't "finding his why." He was trying to survive and keep the lights on.

And that did something to me.

Because I was sitting there with my clean exit and my corporate payout and my "I'm going to take some time" energy… and he was living the reality of building something for real. The kind of building where it's not a slide deck. It's not a quarterly plan. It's not a "strategic initiative."

It's do we make it through this month.

So I started helping out.

At first it was small stuff. I'd stack chairs after close. Wipe tables. Do whatever needed doing. Nothing heroic. Just… useful.

And then it became a rhythm. We'd close up, and I'd hang around. We'd talk. Real talk. The kind of talk corporate never quite prepares you for, because it's not performative. It's not political. It's not about appearing competent.

It's about what's actually happening.

We became mates.

And after a while, Yianni pitched me.

Not some big "we're going to disrupt the industry" pitch. A simple one. A practical one. A very coffee-person pitch.

He said, basically: coffee pods taste like shit.

And they do. Let's not pretend. Most coffee pods taste like someone described coffee to a machine and the machine guessed. People tolerate them because they're convenient, not because they're good.

Yianni's thesis was dead simple: if we put good coffee into pods, maybe they'll taste good.

That was it. That was the pitch.

And the most annoying part?

He was right.

So we did it.

Yianni and I started our first business together. We built it fast, we learned as we went, and we got momentum because we weren't theorising. We were doing. We were in it.

And we thrived.

We ended up exiting the business. Yianni sold the café. And just like that, this little coffee shop I'd been hanging around—this accidental place—became a door.

Not a metaphorical door. A real one.

The first time in years I felt that thing again.

That alive feeling.

The one I used to feel when I played in a band.

Yes, I played in a band. The Method. And we were fucking awesome.

Do not read what the school journalist said. They were students and had no idea what modern fusion punk was. We were ahead of our time. History will vindicate me. Or it won't. Either way, we were loud and it ruled.

But that's the feeling I'm talking about.

When you're building something you actually care about, time changes shape. It’s not nine-to-five. It’s all-consuming—but weirdly energising. You’re tired, but you’re alive. You’re working harder, but it feels lighter. You’re obsessed, but in a good way. The kind of obsessed that makes you wake up with ideas instead of dread.

That was the shock: leaving corporate didn’t make me lazy.

It made me electric.

Because in corporate, my energy had to be managed. Contained. Structured. Budgeted. Scheduled.

In the café world, in the building world, in the “let’s make this real” world… my energy finally had somewhere to go.

This chapter isn’t here to romanticise cafés or tell you to quit your job and start a coffee brand.

It’s here because that café showed me the difference between work that drains you and work that feeds you.

And it also showed me something else: freedom doesn’t arrive as an idea.

It arrives as a door.

Sometimes it looks like a side project. Sometimes it looks like a conversation after close. Sometimes it looks like stacking chairs and being useful when nobody asked you to be.

That’s how it started for me.

Not with a grand plan.

With a café owner in hell, a dumb-simple idea about pods tasting like shit, and the first real feeling of aliveness I’d had in years.

Yianni and I never really stopped.

The coffee thing wasn't a chapter we closed and framed on the wall. It was a doorway we walked through, and then kept walking. Different projects. Different seasons. Same energy. Same pattern: spot something real, build something useful, move fast, learn faster.

These days we work together in fractional work, which is basically the grown-up version of what we were doing back then, except now it's deliberate. It's not "helping out at the café" because your mate is drowning. It's "we know what we're good at, we know what moves the needle, and we're not waiting for permission to do it."

We've got MANWASH—Australia's most loved-by-women men's 3-in-1 wash—which still makes me laugh because it sounds like we built a loophole in the universe. Men use it. Women buy it. Everyone wins. The bottle looks good in the shower. It smells expensive. It's simple. It's not trying too hard. It's exactly what most products should be, and somehow that's still rare.

At the same time, we do these clandestine consulting jobs boosting sales for SaaS businesses. I say clandestine because it's never the polished, public version of work. It's the behind-the-scenes stuff. The unsexy fixes. The "your pipeline is cooked, your message is muddy, your team is performing theatre" conversations. The work where you don't need a title, because the outcome is the title.

And now the funniest part is this: I genuinely don't know what's next.

Not in a stressed way. In a "this is getting interesting" way.

Because once you build your life around outcomes instead of roles, the future stops looking like a ladder and starts looking like a map. There are routes. There are doors. There are side quests that accidentally turn into main quests. There are conversations that become companies.

And somehow, without trying to look cool about it, the waiting list is getting long.

That's the point.

This didn't happen because we manifested. It happened because we kept building. We kept stacking small wins into real reputation. We kept learning what we can deliver, and then delivering it again. We kept moving toward work that feels alive, not work that feels approved.

The corporate story teaches you to wait. Wait for the promotion. Wait for the right time. Wait for confidence. Wait until you're "ready."

Fractional work teaches you something else: if you can create value, you don't have to wait for anything.

You just have to start.

And the longer I do this, the wilder I get.

Not reckless. Not chaotic. Wilder in the sense that my tolerance for fake work is evaporating. My patience for "busy" is gone. My appetite for building real things is getting stronger by the day.

I used to think adulthood meant becoming more sensible.

Turns out it might mean becoming more yourself, until the version of you that would've stayed quiet in a meeting finally stops asking for permission.

And that's where this goes next.

In the next chapter, we're going to talk about the fear that shows up right here, because the moment you taste that aliveness, another voice joins the conversation.

The anxious voice.

The one that says, “This is fun… but is it safe?”

And that voice matters, because it’s usually the thing that drags people back into the cage.

Let’s deal with it properly.

Thriving Amidst AI Anxiety

"Only the paranoid survive."
Andy Grove

AI is going to change how we work.

There. I said it. You can breathe now.

Because the weirdest part of this whole moment isn't the technology, it's the theatre around it. The media headlines. The LinkedIn prophets. The "Top 10 jobs that will be dead by Friday" carousel posts. The guy who discovered ChatGPT last week and now speaks exclusively in certainty.

Ignore all of it.

Not because AI isn't real, but because the hot takes are mostly entertainment. They're designed to spike your nervous system, not sharpen your thinking. Fear gets clicks. Calm doesn't. Nuance definitely doesn't.

And yes, I can go on a "jobs are doomed" rant. I can do the whole thing. I can talk about automation, outsourcing, labour arbitrage, corporate cost-cutting, the disappearance of middle layers, the death of the "good salary for being competent" era.

But that's not the most useful way to understand what's happening.

The more immediate truth is simpler, and honestly, more brutal.

A lot of what you've been paid to do… wasn't value.

It was admin.

It was coordination.

It was formatting.

It was chasing approvals.

It was creating documents about work instead of doing work. (you know what I'm talking about, a day to make a PowerPoint FFS)

It was translating common sense into corporate language so it could be “socialised” and “aligned” and “reviewed” and “actioned” sometime in Q3 after the next restructure.

It was the grown-up version of moving piles from one side of the desk to the other, then feeling productive because your calendar looked full.

And AI is coming directly for that.

Not because it hates you. Because it’s better at it.

AI doesn’t get tired. It doesn’t get bored. It doesn’t procrastinate. It doesn’t need a meeting to confirm what the meeting is about. It doesn’t spend three hours rewriting a sentence to sound more “executive.” It doesn’t need you to “circle back” because it never left the circle in the first place.

This is what people miss when they panic about AI “taking jobs.”

It’s not taking your job.

It’s taking the junk inside your job.

The part you always knew was nonsense but tolerated because it came with a salary and a sense of belonging.

And here’s where the anxiety spikes: if the junk disappears, what’s left?

Only **value.**

That’s it.

Only **value** exists.

Not effort. Not presence. Not responsiveness. Not “being across it.” Not “keeping things moving.” Not “stakeholder management” as a substitute for results.

Value.

The kind that changes something.

The kind that creates revenue, reduces cost, removes friction, improves **outcomes**, increases trust, builds momentum.

Which means the winners in the AI era won’t be the people who are “good at work.”

They’ll be the people who can create value... and prove it.

That’s the game now.

If your job has been mostly admin wrapped in professionalism, you’re right to feel anxious. Not because you’re useless. Because you’ve been trapped inside a system that rewarded a lot of non-value behaviours as if they were value.

If you’ve built your identity on being the person who always responds quickly, who always has the doc, who always knows the process, who keeps everyone organised, who’s reliable and across it…

AI is going to make you feel like someone just turned the lights on at the end of the party.

Not because you’re bad.

Because the market is changing what it rewards.

And here’s the good news, which I know sounds suspicious because most people don’t come to AI conversations for good news.

The good news is that value creation is still deeply human.

AI can generate words. It can generate options. It can generate code. It can generate design drafts and summaries and strategies and plans.

But it still can’t fully replace the person who can see what matters, decide what to do, make a call, take a risk, and own the outcome.

It can’t replace taste.

It can’t replace judgement.

It can’t replace leadership.

It can’t replace the human ability to walk into a messy situation and say, “Right. Here’s what’s actually going on, and here’s what we’re going to do next.”

That’s what thriving looks like now.

Not being the most organised person in the meeting.

Being the person who makes the meeting unnecessary.

The people who will win in this era are the ones who can do at least one of these things consistently:

They can create something.

Not just "produce." Create. Build a thing that didn't exist. A product. A system. A brand. A campaign. A framework. A solution. A workflow that removes friction. A new way of doing something that actually works.

They can teach something.

Not in the cringe "guru" way. In the useful way. They can explain complexity clearly. They can help other people get unstuck. They can turn knowledge into movement. They can make a team better, faster, more confident.

They can convey value.

They can articulate why something matters. They can connect the dots between action and outcome. They can speak in the language of results, not tasks. They can sell without being slimy. They can show impact without hiding behind dashboards.

They can direct.

They can make decisions. They can prioritise. They can lead. They can take responsibility when it would be easier to hide inside the group and wait for consensus.

That's it.

Create. Teach. Convey. Direct.

If you can do those things, AI isn't your enemy.

AI is your leverage.

Because now the admin disappears and your output scales. You spend less time formatting and more time thinking. Less time "updating the doc" and more time creating the outcome. Less time being busy, more time being effective.

And here's the part nobody says out loud because it makes people uncomfortable:

A lot of professionals aren't scared of AI because it's powerful.

They're scared because it reveals how little of their day was real value in the first place.

Which is confronting.

But it's also liberating.

Because if "only value exists" now, you don't need to be perfect. You don't need to be everywhere. You don't need to play politics. You don't need to climb the ladder or collect titles.

You need to become someone who can create outcomes.

And the beautiful thing about outcomes is they don't care where you came from.

They don't care about your résumé.

They don't care about your job title.

They care about one thing:

Can you make something move?

That's the futureproofing.

Not learning every AI tool. Not memorising prompts like spells. Not panicking every time a new model drops.

Future-proofing is becoming the kind of person who can take AI, aim it at a real problem, and deliver a real result.

The anxious version of you wants certainty. It wants guarantees. It wants someone to say, “Here’s the list of safe careers.”

I can’t give you that. Nobody can.

But I can give you something better: a direction.

Move away from admin.

Move toward value.

Move away from being a cog.

Move toward being a creator of outcomes.

Because in a world where the busywork is automated, the people who thrive won’t be the ones who did the most.

They’ll be the ones who mattered.

In the next chapter, we’re going to talk about how to find and define your value, without the corporate badge, without the title, without the safety blanket, so you can stop guessing what you’re worth and start building a life that pays you for it.

A Brief History Of Work (according to me)

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."
Alvin Toffler

When Your Surname Was Your Resume.

OK, I'll be honest, I haven't really researched this down to the actual historic events (it was really boring) but it feels right, so I'll push on, and hopefully you'll arrive at the same conclusions.

Before the industrial revolution, work wasn't a job you "had."

It was a thing you were.

You didn't ask, "So what do you do?" because everyone already knew. Your work sat right on your face like a name tag you couldn't peel off—because it literally was your name.

Your surname wasn't branding. It was a description.

If your name was **Smith**, congratulations, your family hit metal for a living. **Baker** baked. **Miller** milled grain. **Fletcher** made arrows. **Cooper** made barrels. **Carter** moved goods. **Taylor** stitched clothes. **Wright** built things. **Turner** turned wood on a lathe. **Butcher** did what it says on the tin. **Fisher** fished. **Weaver** wove. **Chandler** made candles. **Shepherd** handled sheep. **Mason** built with stone.

These weren't cute historical fun facts. They were the original "value proposition."

Your work was your identity because your work was your role in the community. People didn't pay you for "hours." They paid you because you made something, fixed something, improved something, or helped them survive winter without dying.

Simple system. Slightly stressful winters. But the logic was clean: you created value, you got paid.

Then the industrial revolution rolled in like a loud, smoking machine and basically said, "That's adorable. We're doing factories now."

Work shifted from craft to scale. From outcome to process. From community value to production value. Instead of "I make barrels," it became "I operate the barrel machine for twelve hours and try not to think too hard about existence."

The upside was massive: goods became cheaper, cities grew, economies exploded, people got access to things that used to be luxuries.

The downside was also massive: identity got separated from value.

You weren't the Baker anymore. You were Employee #4837 in the bread division.

And for a while, that deal worked. You could trade time for money and build a stable life. The job became the container. The company name became your identity. The surname faded into "cute trivia."

Then robotics and globalisation took a baseball bat to the factory era.

Machines got better. Labour got cheaper elsewhere. Supply chains stretched across the planet. Factories that once supported entire towns either automated, moved, or disappeared. Those "solid" jobs (the ones people were told would always be there if you worked hard) started vanishing. Slowly at first. Then quickly. Then permanently.

So the economy shifted again.

The new stable class became **professionals**.

Office work. Knowledge work. White-collar roles. The new middle class of the late 20th century. People in suits, behind screens, paid to think, plan, manage, coordinate, and make decisions. Factory jobs declined. Professional jobs rose. University became the new apprenticeship. Corporate became the new guild.

And now we're watching the next shift.

AI is doing to a lot of professional work what robotics did to factory work. Not all of it. Not the human core. But the repetitive parts. The admin parts. The coordination parts. The "move this information from here to there and call it productivity" parts.

Which leaves us in a weird place where something old is suddenly new again.

Tradespeople are in demand. Specialists are in demand. People who can actually make things happen in the real world are booked out. The plumber doesn't care about your job title. The electrician doesn't care about your organisational chart. The builder doesn't care how good you are at "stakeholder alignment."

They care about the job. The outcome. The delivery.

And here's the kicker: they still work like the businesses of old.

Tradespeople operate like little self-contained economies. They build reputation. They build repeat customers. They build networks. They price outcomes. They get referrals. They live and die by delivery. They don't get paid for "busy." They get paid because the thing gets done.

Which is why the future of white-collar work is starting to look… oddly familiar.

We're circling back to a world where your work becomes your identity again, not in a cringey "personal brand" way, but in a simple, old-world way:

People know what you do because your outcomes speak for you.

Your reputation becomes the new surname.

And that's the cycle.

Community crafts → factories → professional class → fractional specialists.

Different tools. Same underlying logic. When the system gets too bloated, too rigid, too expensive, work breaks back down into smaller units of value. People return to being known for what they can do, not what organisation they belong to.

So if this whole "fractional" thing feels like the future, it's because it is.

And if it also feels weirdly ancient, it's because it is that too.

We're not inventing a new way of working.

We're remembering an old one, then upgrading it with Wi-Fi, AI, and slightly worse posture.

Why Are You Considering Fractional Work?

You didn't pick up (download) a book like this because everything feels stable and delightful.

You picked it up because, somewhere between the restructure emails, the "quick syncs" that multiply like rabbits, and the bizarre experience of being judged on visibility instead of value, a thought has started to whisper:

There has to be a smarter way to work than this.

Not "I hate my job." Not "I want to run away to Bali and become a coconut entrepreneur." Just… something more aligned. More direct. More in your control. More like you doing what you're actually good at, without having to roleplay as a corporate NPC to earn it.

That's what fractional work is.
It's not a trend.
It's not a personality type.
It's a buying model that matches where work is heading: companies paying for outcomes, not your attendance.

And this section is the gateway into the rest of the book, because once you understand *why* fractional matters, everything else clicks.
The offers.
The pricing.
The negotiation.
The pipeline.
The finance.
The confidence.
The identity shift.

But here's the best part, and I want you to really hear this:

> Even if you never go fractional, this book still upgrades you.

Because the real transformation isn't "leave your job."

It's learning to think like a business owner.

That mindset makes you more valuable anywhere.
It makes you harder to replace.
It makes you calmer in uncertainty.
It gives you options.

And options are the real definition of security now.

Why fractional, though?

Because the old deal is changing.
For a long time, employment was a simple trade: you give time and availability, the company gives money and structure. It wasn't perfect, but it was predictable. You could plan around it. You could build a life around it.

Then the world got weird.

The result is a market that increasingly looks like this:

> Project teams, not permanent teams.
> Specialists on demand, not headcount forever.
> Outcomes purchased, not hours rented.
> Capability, not titles.

That's fractional work in plain English. It's just choosing to meet the market where it's going, rather than hoping it returns to what it was.

The real reason people consider fractional.
It's not because they want freedom.
Not really.
It's because they want honesty.

Fractional is a more honest exchange. You're not paid to look busy. You're paid to make things happen. You're not rewarded for "being in the room."

You're rewarded for creating an outcome that matters.

If you're the kind of person who's good at building momentum, fixing problems, moving deals, creating clarity, calming chaos, and actually delivering… fractional can feel like breathing fresh air again.

And there's another reason, especially in this economy:

Resilience.

Employment often gives you one income stream. One boss. One point of failure.

Fractional spreads risk. Multiple clients. Multiple relationships. Multiple revenue streams. It's not risk-free, but it's a different kind of risk. The kind you can manage. You're building a portfolio instead of praying one company stays stable.

That's why you'll see more "fractional" roles appear. It's not just workers choosing it. It's companies buying it.

Big business has always loved this model.

That's why the big consulting firms exist.

They don't hire a full-time brain for every problem, they buy the result.

Fractional work is simply the smaller, more modern version of that same truth.
Now here's the plot twist…
You don't need to become fractional to use the fractional advantage.
Because once you learn to think like a business owner, you start winning inside employment too.
You stop doing "tasks" and start delivering outcomes.
You learn to communicate your value clearly, without cringe.
You negotiate your role based on impact, not effort.
You set boundaries that protect your best work.

You stop being managed by other people's urgency.
You become the person leaders rely on when something matters.

That mindset changes everything.

Not because you become louder. Because you become clearer.

And clarity creates confidence.

A lot of people stay stuck because they believe their job is the only safe option. They tell themselves the market is impossible. That they're replaceable. That nobody would pay for what they know.

This book is going to gently, repeatedly, and very practically prove that's not true.
Not with hype.
With tools.
With templates.
With frameworks you can use immediately.
With ways to package what you know, start conversations, build proof, and make your value visible.

So if you're reading this thinking, "I don't even know if I want to go fractional," good.

You don't have to decide today.

This isn't a book about quitting.

It's a book about options.

About ownership.

About building a career and a life around who you are and what you're good at, not just what you've been told is "secure."

Fractional might be the path you take.

Or it might simply be the lens that makes you unstoppable wherever you are.

Either way, you're in the right place.

Let's keep going.

See Your Value: Defining Your Unique Advantage

"In your career… being safe is risky. The path to lifetime job security is to be remarkable."
Seth Godin

Building a Brand as a Fractional Expert

Let's make this practical, because "build your brand" is one of those phrases that sounds like a TED Talk and feels like homework.

Also, the word brand has been ruined by people who post shirtless mindset content and call it "leadership." So when I say brand, I don't mean aesthetics, logos, or you turning your life into a personal infomercial.

I mean something simpler and far more useful:

Your brand is what people assume you can do, before you even open your mouth.

As a fractional expert, you don't get hired because you're available. You get hired because a buyer believes you will produce an outcome. That belief forms before the proposal, before the call, before the "send me your deck."

And the fastest way to build that belief is to be relentlessly clear about the value you create, and to make it measurable enough that it sounds real.

That's the whole chapter.

You're not building "a personal brand."

You’re building proof of value.

Step One: Stop Describing What You Do. Start Describing What Changes.

Most people pitch fractional work like this:

“I do marketing.”

“I’m in ops.”

“I consult on sales.”

“I help with strategy.”

That’s not a brand. That’s a category.

And categories are where your pricing goes to die.

A fractional brand is not “what you do.” It’s the before-and-after you create.

So instead of “I’m a marketer,” you want something like:

> “I help B2B companies turn ‘we need more leads’ into a predictable pipeline.”
>
> “I shorten sales cycles by removing the friction that stalls deals.”
>
> “I build founder-led content systems that create inbound demand.”
>
> “I help teams ship faster by cutting decision bottlenecks.”

Notice what’s happening: the work becomes a change, not a function.

Here's the tool for this:

> Write down your last 10 projects (jobs count). For each, answer:
>
> What was broken when I arrived?
>
> What changed because I was there?
>
> What moved? (speed, revenue, cost, risk, retention, clarity, confidence)

If you can't answer those, don't panic. It just means corporate trained you to describe tasks, not outcomes. We're untraining that.

Step Two: Extract Your Value Assets

Your work has "value assets" hidden inside it—things you did that are worth money outside of a title.

Most people can't see them because they were buried in team effort, politics, and job descriptions.

This is how you extract them.

Make a list of:
- The problems you repeatedly solve
- The situations you're reliably good in
- The leverage you bring (what happens faster, better, cheaper, safer with you involved?)

Now look for patterns.
- You might notice things like:
- You're always the person called in when things are messy.

• You’re the translator between tech and business.
• You’re the one who gets “stuck” teams moving.
• You’re the one who builds the plan people actually follow.
• You’re the one who makes the message land.
• You’re the one who walks into chaos and creates clarity.

Those are not personality traits.

Those are billable outcomes.

Step Three: Turn Outcomes Into Metrics (Without Becoming a Spreadsheet Goblin)

Quantifying value doesn’t mean turning into a finance bro.

It means helping a buyer understand what your work is worth in their language: money, time, risk, and growth.

There are four measurement buckets that cover almost everything:

Revenue created

Cost removed

Time saved

Risk reduced

If you can tie your work to one of those, you can price with confidence.

Here’s the simplest quant tool you’ll use in this book:

The “Value Equation” (normal person version)

Value = (Money gained + Money saved) + (Time saved × hourly value) + risk reduction

You don’t need perfect numbers. You need believable ones.

Let’s do examples.

If you helped improve conversion rate on inbound leads from 2% to 3% and they get 1,000 leads/month and average deal value is $10,000, that’s not “marketing help.”

That’s revenue.

If you reduced churn by 1% in a SaaS business doing $2M ARR, that’s not “customer success support.”

That’s retained revenue.

If you saved a team of 8 people one hour per week by fixing a broken workflow, that’s not “ops.”

That’s time reclaimed, time that can be redirected into shipping, selling, or serving customers.

If you built a compliance process that avoided fines, incidents, or reputation damage, that’s not “admin.”

That’s risk reduction.

Buyers don’t pay for your effort. They pay for the shape of the business after you touch it.

Step Four: Build Your “Proof Stack”

A fractional brand is built on proof, not vibes.

The goal is to create a simple stack of credibility signals that all point to the same thing: this person produces outcomes like mine.

Your proof stack has five parts:

- **A clear promise** (one sentence: who you help + what outcome you deliver)
- **A set of repeatable outcomes** (3–5 outcomes you’ve delivered more than once)
- **A few numbers** (even ranges are fine)
- **Stories** (short before/after stories, not a biography)
- **Receipts** (testimonials, screenshots, case studies, references, portfolio)

If you’re early, you won’t have all of these. That’s okay. Start building them intentionally.

The minimum viable proof stack is:

A promise + one story + one measurable result.

And yes, you can do that even if you’ve never “consulted” before. Your job experience counts, if you translate it into outcomes.

Step Five: Create Your Brand Sentence (The One People Remember)

This is where we make it simple enough to repeat.

Use this format (and promise not to make this your LinkedIn headline):

“I help [specific person/company] achieve [specific outcome] by [your method], usually within [timeframe].”

Examples:

> "I help SaaS founders build a predictable pipeline by fixing their messaging and sales process, usually within 90 days."
>
> "I help marketing teams turn content into inbound demand by building systems that ship weekly, usually within 6 weeks."
>
> "I help growing businesses tighten operations so they scale without chaos, usually within a quarter."

Your goal isn't perfection.

Your goal is clarity.

Because clarity is what makes people refer you.

And referrals are what make fractional work feel like cheating.

Step Six: Price Like a Specialist, Not a Temp

If you present yourself like a pair of hands, you'll be priced like labour.

If you present yourself like a specialist who produces outcomes, you can price like a business.

This means you should stop quoting hourly rates as your main offer.

Hours are what companies buy when they don't believe you can deliver an outcome.

Outcomes are what they buy when they do.

You don't need to become arrogant. You just need to stop apologising for value.

A practical rule:

If your work can be measured in revenue, cost, time, or risk, don't price it like labour.

Price it like impact.

We will get more into pricing later.

The Real Brand Shift

Here's the mindset shift that makes everything above work.

Your corporate identity trained you to think: "I'm valuable because I have a role."

Fractional work requires you to think: "I'm valuable because I create outcomes."

A role is permission.

An outcome is power.

And the brand you're building isn't you shouting into the void hoping people notice.

It's you getting so clear on the value you create that the right people start describing you when you're not in the room.

In the next chapter, we'll take that clarity and turn it into an offer, packaging, pricing, and the uncomfortable but necessary part: asking to be paid for the outcome you already know you can deliver.

Emotions, the Corporate Lizard Brain, and Other Uninvited Guests

"Failure taught me things about myself that I could have learned no other way."
J.K. Rowling

Ok, I know I'm bullish and shouty, but I'm not a rock. I want to address the emotions and self talk that accompany considering this shift.

Let's talk about the part nobody puts in the "quit your job" stories.

Not the spreadsheets. Not the offers. Not the pipeline.

The feelings.

Because the moment you start thinking seriously about fractional work, your body reacts like you've just suggested living off-grid and eating moss. Your brain doesn't calmly weigh pros and cons. It launches a full internal PR campaign titled:

THIS IS A TERRIBLE IDEA AND WE WILL DIE.

That's your corporate lizard brain. It's not evil. It's not stupid. It's protective. It's been trained by decades of cultural programming that says stability equals employment, and anything else is a weird hobby for people who own vans and call themselves "founders."

So if you're feeling anxious, twitchy, guilty, excited, nauseous, or strangely defensive... good.

You're normal.

I want to name a few of the nagging questions that show up, because you'll think you're the only one having them, and then you'll spiral in silence like a professional.

The first one is the big one.

"Isn't this risky?"

And your brain says it like it's caught you shoplifting.

Here's what's funny: a lot of us grew up seeing people, maybe your parents, maybe someone you admired, who worked at the same place forever. Not "a few years." Forever.

Decades.

Same company. Same identity. Same desk. Same colleagues. Same Christmas party. Same slow march toward a retirement gift and a handshake that says, "Thanks for giving us your whole life."

That was a real thing. And in some industries, it still happens, but not many.

Because that deal changed.

Now it feels like there are layoffs every time a government sneezes. The second there's a wobble in the "economic environment," companies suddenly discover "strategic opportunities to downsize."

They don't even try to hide it anymore. They've got the language pre-written.

"We're making difficult decisions."

"We're streamlining."

"We're focusing on core priorities."

"We're responding to market conditions."

It's corporate theatre, but the consequences are real.

So yes, fractional life can be risky.

But can we be honest for one minute?

So is employment now.

The difference is fractional risk is visible, so your brain panics about it. Employment risk is hidden behind a salary, so your brain pretends it doesn't exist.

If you're thinking, "At least with a job I know what I'm getting," I get it. That feeling is powerful.

But the market has been quietly changing the meaning of "know."

And here's where the lizard brain really loses its mind:

• In fractional work, it's completely normal to have other work lined up.
• In a job, that's betrayal. In fractional, it's called being responsible.

Let me say that again because it matters:

> **In fractional, having multiple engagements isn't instability.**
>
> **It's the safety mechanism.**

The corporate brain can't comprehend this because corporate trains you to put all your eggs in one basket and then call it loyalty. Fractional work trains you to spread your eggs across a few baskets and call it… sane.

And when you do it properly, you don't manage your work like a single line graph, one income source, up or down, entirely dependent on one employer's mood.

You manage it more like a Gantt chart.

Overlapping projects. Staggered start and end dates. A little buffer here. A ramp-up there. A new engagement starting before another ends. Not chaos. Design.

And the conversations that create that work aren't job interviews, either.

They're sales calls.

That's a huge emotional shift. Job interviews make you feel judged. Sales calls make you feel equal. You're not begging for a role. You're discussing a problem you can solve.

Your lizard brain might hate that at first. It will tell you you're not "allowed" to do that. It will tell you you need permission. It will tell you to be grateful someone even took the call.

That's indoctrination.

It wears a suit.

Now, I'm going to be upfront: I run hard at this stuff. I like momentum. I like building. I like the hunt. I like the feeling of being alive inside the work. I've got a slightly unhealthy love for starting things and making them real.

But you don’t have to do it like that.

This can be built slowly.

It should be built thoughtfully.

You can start with one small engagement. One outcome-based offer. One client. One proof point. One receipt. You can stack confidence the same way you stack capability—by doing.

And at some point, yes, a jump will be required.

Not necessarily a dramatic leap off a cliff, but a moment where you stop treating fractional work as “a side thing” and start treating it as your actual path.

That moment is scary because the lizard brain hates ambiguity.

But it’s also better on your terms.

Because the jump happens one way or another.

Either you choose it deliberately, with a plan, with savings, with a pipeline, with a half-built parachute…

Or the market chooses it for you, and you’re trying to pack the parachute on the way down.

I’m not saying this to scare you. I’m saying it because you deserve to be treated like an adult.

And also because I don’t want you blaming me at family dinner.

So let me be very clear:

If you are absolutely killing it in a great company, you feel stable, you're happy, you love the work, you love the people, and you genuinely see nothing but upside…

Stay.

For fuck sake, stay.

Enjoy it. Build. Learn. Earn. Have fun.

Do not tell your mum that I made you quit your job because some bloke with a book told you corporate is a cage. I don't need that kind of reputation.

But even if you stay, **be prepared.**

Not paranoid. Prepared.

Build optionality. Build skills. Build proof of value. Build a network that isn't dependent on your job title. Build a pipeline quietly, like a responsible adult with a secret plan.

Because markets shift. Governments sneeze. CEOs panic. Boards demand "efficiency." And suddenly the stability you thought you had becomes an email with your name on it.

Here's the part I want to land gently, because it matters.

Emotions are real.

They aren't a weakness. They're a signal. They're your system trying to keep you alive.

And planning for this life isn't just planning for money.

It’s planning for emotions.

It’s planning for the day you doubt yourself. The day a client ghosts you. The day you miss the comfort of certainty. The day you feel jealous of someone with a salary. The day your partner asks, “So… how’s it going?” and your throat tightens because you don’t have a neat answer.

That’s all normal.

So treat emotional planning like business planning.

You don’t wait for chaos to show up and then improvise. You build buffers. You build routines. You build support. You build a system that holds you when your nervous system tries to drag you back to what’s familiar.

This isn’t about being fearless.

It’s about being honest.

The lizard brain will come with you either way. You can’t fire it. You can only manage it.

And the most freeing thing you can do is stop asking, “Why do I feel this?”

And start asking, “How do I build a plan that accounts for it?”

Because the goal isn’t to become a robot.

The goal is to become resilient.

Even when your brain is yelling at you in a corporate accent.

Initiate Your Offer: Packaging & Pricing Outcomes

"Earn with your mind, not your time."
Naval Ravikant

Charging for Outcomes, Not Hours

The first question everyone asks (out loud or quietly in the shower, where all honest thoughts live) isn't "How do I price this?"

It's: **Where will I find the time?**

Because your brain has been trained to believe work equals hours. Hours equal effort. Effort equals virtue. Virtue equals safety. And safety equals… not starving.

That's the corporate lizard brain talking. It's the part of you that thinks time is the only "real" thing you can offer, because time is what you've been selling your whole life.

So when someone says, "Charge for outcomes," your nervous system hears: "Charge for vibes."

And it panics.

But here's the uncomfortable truth you don't want to hear, and I'm saying it anyway because this is a book and I'm allowed to ruin your delusions: you probably work about **three** focused hours a day.

Max.

And before you argue with me, let's be honest about what "work" actually looks like for most professionals.

There’s the commute. There’s the coffee run. There’s the “quick chat” that turns into a twenty-minute therapy session in the kitchen. There’s the meeting that could’ve been an email, and the email that somehow became a meeting. There’s the time you spend looking busy because being visibly idle is suspicious. There’s the Slack checking. There’s the inbox refreshing. There’s the fifteen minutes you lose every hour re-entering focus because someone pinged you with “hey got a sec?”

And then there’s the real killer: pfaffing around.

Yes, I said pfaffing. It’s the most accurate word we have for that professional art form where you do tasks that feel like work but produce absolutely nothing. You rearrange. You tweak. You reword. You “prepare.” You “circle back.” You open a doc and stare at it like it owes you money.

You call it being busy. It’s mostly avoidance with a calendar invite.

Oh, and let’s not forget the real productivity tax: trying to get the Kingston biscuits from the Arnott’s Assorted Creams before Devina gets to them.

That is not a metaphor. That is a workplace reality. It’s competitive. It’s hostile. It’s survival!

Now, take all of that out.

What’s left?

Usually, about three hours of actual focused work, the kind where you create something, decide something, solve something, move something forward.

And here’s the part that proves everything: even with those three hours, you still delivered outcomes.

Projects shipped. Deals closed. Clients retained. Problems solved. Teams moved. Revenue grew. Somehow, in amongst the coffee runs and the Slack theatre, things still happened.

Which means your value was never in the hours.

It was in what you did when you were actually switched on.

That's the shift fractional work forces you to make: stop mistaking time spent for value created.

For me, the real mental unlock happened when a client basically told me he didn't even want me to show up.

He didn't want meetings. He didn't want updates. He didn't want a weekly "touch base." He didn't want me to be part of the culture. He didn't want to "align stakeholders."

He wanted results.

Leads. Deals. Momentum.

And then (this is the best part) he wanted to leave me alone.

It was the most romantic thing a buyer has ever said to me, and I'm only half joking.

We structured the deal as **$1,000 a week** plus **30% commission on closed deals.**

Now, if you're an indoctrinated account manager, this sounds awful.

Thirty percent? Risk? Performance? No guaranteed salary? What about "time and materials"? What about billable hours? What about the comfort of being paid even if nothing happens?

I get it. The corporate brain hates this structure because corporate teaches you to protect your time, not leverage your outcomes.

But if you're a fractional executive, this deal is fucking great.

Because it flips the entire relationship.

I'm not being paid to be present. I'm being paid to produce.

Which means I can prospect, close, and move on in an hour a day if I'm sharp. No theatre. No fluff. No pretending that "being busy" is the same as being effective.

And here's where it gets interesting.

Once you realise you can create real outcomes in a small amount of focused time, the question "Where will I find the time?" starts to fall apart.

Because the goal was never to replace your nine-to-five with another nine-to-five.

The goal is to stack outcomes.

One hour a day on this client. Forty-five minutes on another. Two focused sessions a week on a third. A day a fortnight on a fourth. You're not selling your week. You're selling results, delivered efficiently.

That's how you can have five fractional engagements at once and still feel more in control than you ever did as a full-time employee.

Not because you're working less.

Because you're working cleaner.

Less pretending. Less admin. Less pfaffing. More focus. More value. More leverage.

And yes, it can feel scary at first, because you don't have the warm blanket of hours. You can't hide behind effort. You can't say, "Well, I worked really hard," as if that's the point.

You either moved the needle or you didn't.

Which is exactly why it's the future.

Because in a world (haha, ironic AI response) where AI eats the admin, the only thing left is outcomes. And the people who learn to price, sell, and deliver outcomes will be the ones who thrive.

The ones who cling to hours will be stuck selling a commodity the market is trying to eliminate.

So if you're sitting there thinking, "But I don't have time," I want you to do something very unsexy and very powerful:

Take a real week. Track your actual focused work time. Not the hours you're "at work." The hours you are truly producing. Deep work. Real thinking. Real creating. Real selling. Real delivering.

Then ask yourself a dangerous question:

If I can deliver outcomes in three focused hours a day inside a corporate job… what could I do with those same hours if I owned them?

That's the difference between employment and fractional work.

Employment rents your time.

Fractional work sells your outcomes.

And once you taste that, going back to hourly thinking feels like going back to dial-up internet. You can do it, technically.

But why would you?

Packaging Your Value: Crafting Outcome-Based Offers

"Wind extinguishes a candle and energizes fire… You want to be the fire and wish for the wind."

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

If you've made it this far, you've probably had the same thought everyone has at this point:

"Okay… I get outcomes. I get value. But how do I actually sell this without sounding like a clown?"

Good question.

Because the fastest way to kill a fractional career is to be vague. Vague is comfortable. Vague is safe. Vague is what corporate taught you. Vague is also how you end up doing a million little tasks for a fixed monthly fee while your client calls it "support" and you quietly age ten years.

An outcome-based offer is the opposite of vague.

It's a container for value.

It's the line between "I'm here to help" and "I'm here to deliver something specific, and we'll both know when it's done."

And if you do it properly, it protects you and helps the client win. Which is the only kind of deal worth doing.

The goal here isn't to become some pricing wizard. The goal is to design offers that set you up for success—offers where the value you deliver is clear, the scope is contained, the timeline is sane, and you've got margin baked in.

Margin, by the way, isn't greed. Margin is oxygen. Margin is what keeps you from resenting the work. Margin is what lets you do a great job without becoming a hostage to someone else's chaos.

So let's build the offer.

Start With the Outcome, Not the Activities

Most people package their value like a to-do list.

"I'll post three times a week, run ads, update the CRM, do the reporting, attend weekly meetings, rewrite the deck…"

That's not an offer. That's a job description wearing a trench coat.

Activities are what you do. Outcomes are what changes.

Your offer should lead with the change. Not the checklist.

So instead of "I'll do sales support," you lead with something like:

> "I'll build a predictable outbound engine that generates qualified meetings each week."

Instead of "I'll help with marketing," you lead with:

> "I'll fix your positioning and messaging so your market actually understands why you're different."

Instead of "I'll do ops," you lead with:

> "I'll remove bottlenecks so your team can ship faster without chaos."

The outcome becomes the product.

The work becomes the method.

The 4-Part Offer Structure That Actually Works

An outcome-based offer is easiest to craft when it has four parts:

1) Duration

2) Deliverables (the proof of work, not the work itself)

3) Success metrics

4) Price structure (base + performance)

Let’s go through them.

1) Duration: Make It Finite So It Stays Valuable

If your offer has no end date, you didn’t build an offer.

You built a subscription to your sanity.

Fixed duration creates focus. It forces prioritisation. It creates urgency without manipulation.

Most outcome offers fit into one of these windows:

- A short sprint (2–4 weeks)
- A build phase (6–8 weeks)
- A quarter (90 days)

Pick the shortest timeframe in which you can confidently produce a real change.

And here’s the rule: if you’re unsure, go shorter.

Long vague engagements are where scope creep breeds.

Short defined engagements are where reputation grows.

2) Deliverables: Only Include What Proves the Outcome

Deliverables are not "all the things you'll do."

Deliverables are the proof that you did what you said you'd do.

Think of them like artifacts.

For a sales-focused offer, deliverables might be:

• A new ICP definition and target list.
• A messaging framework and outreach sequences.
• A working outbound system in CRM.
• A weekly pipeline dashboard.

For a brand offer, deliverables might be:

• Positioning statement and differentiation map.
• Offer messaging and landing page copy.
• Content pillar system and publishing cadence.

For an ops offer, deliverables might be:

• New workflow, automation, and handoff process.
• A simplified reporting structure.
• A documented system that runs without you.

Deliverables should be minimal and meaningful.

If you list ten deliverables, you're pricing your labour again.

3) Success Metrics: Decide How You'll Know You've Won

This is where you become dangerous, in a good way.

Success metrics protect you from vague expectations. They also protect the client from paying for "effort."

Metrics can be:

- Meetings booked per week
- Conversion rate improvements
- Pipeline value created
- Revenue closed
- Time saved
- Cycle time reduced
- Churn reduced
- Cost removed

But here's the important part: choose metrics you can influence.

You **can** influence meetings booked.

You **can't** control a client's sales team closing deals if they're allergic to follow-up.

You **can** influence messaging clarity.

You **can't** control whether their product is a mess.

So you set metrics around what you can deliver, and you leave what you can't control as optional upside.

Which brings us to performance.

4) Price Structure: Base + Outcome Bonus (Commission or Payout)

This is the part that makes corporate brains sweat.

Good.

Because the point is to stop pricing like an employee.

A strong outcome-based deal usually has:

A base fee that covers your time and guarantees commitment.

A performance component that rewards results.

The base fee is there so you're not gambling your week on someone else's execution.

The performance component is there because you're confident in the value you create—and you want to share in upside.

There are a few common structures.

- A commission model: percentage of deals closed, revenue generated, or savings achieved.
- A milestone payout: bonus triggered when a defined outcome is achieved.
- A tiered bonus: larger payouts as performance levels are hit.

Examples (keep it simple):

- A fixed weekly/monthly fee + commission on closed deals.
- A 90-day build fee + bonus when pipeline or conversion targets are hit.
- A sprint fee + payout when launch or delivery metrics are met.

The performance component should feel fair, measurable, and tied to a metric you can actually influence.

If it depends on five internal stakeholders and a board sign-off, it's not performance-based—it's faith-based.

Build in Margin by Sandbagging (Professionally)

Now, let's talk about the thing nobody says out loud.

You need margin.

You need enough slack in the deal that you can over-deliver without burning out, and recover when the client delays, changes direction, or suddenly discovers they "actually need it by tomorrow."

So yes, build the offer so you can win even if reality behaves like reality.

This is where "sandbagging" gets a bad reputation. But done properly, it's not deception. It's competence.

You're accounting for the fact that:

Clients move slow.

Approvals take time.

Access to data gets delayed.

Someone key goes on leave.

Internal politics show up.

The scope tries to creep.

So when you set targets, set ones you can hit even with friction.

When you set timelines, set ones that allow for delays.

When you price, price for the real effort, including the hidden effort of wrangling.

Margin is not about doing less.

Margin is about making sure you can still deliver under imperfect conditions.

The Offer One-Pager

Here's what your offer should look like when it's clean.

Not a giant proposal. Not a deck. A one-pager.

Who it's for.

- The outcome.
- The duration.
- The deliverables.
- The success metrics.
- The price (base + performance).
- The assumptions (what you need from the client).
- The boundaries (what's not included).

That's it.

When your offer fits on one page, it forces clarity.

When it needs twelve pages, it’s usually because you’re hiding behind detail.

The Real Goal: A Deal You Can Repeat

The magic of outcome-based offers is that they become repeatable.

You’re not selling yourself from scratch every time.

You’re selling a productised outcome with a clear container.

That’s how you build a fractional career that scales without chaos.

And it’s also how you build a waiting list, because people don’t refer “a person who helps.”

They refer “the person who fixed our positioning and doubled inbound,” or “the person who built our outbound engine,” or “the person who cleaned up our pipeline and got deals moving again.”

So if you do nothing else from this chapter, do this:

Write one offer. One outcome. One duration. One set of metrics. One base fee. One performance component.

Make it simple enough to explain in one breath.

Make it specific enough to measure.

Make it safe enough that you can deliver it with margin.

Then sell that (we will go into this as well, I know it's not that simple).

Deliver it.

Get the result.

Collect the receipt.

And repeat.

That’s not just deal crafting.

That’s how you become a fractional expert with a brand people can actually trust.

The Other Side: How Companies See Fractional

"Do what you do best and outsource the rest."
Peter Drucker

Fine, I'll Be Nice About Companies for a Minute

I've been a bit unkind to "the corporate world" in this book.

Some of that was necessary. A little verbal violence clears the fog. But I also want to eat my words, partly because it's fair, and partly because karma has a sense of humour and I'd like to stay on its good side.

Because here's the truth: **I run multiple companies now.**

And I don't hire.

Not because I'm allergic to employees or because I think I'm some edgy anti-HR philosopher. I don't hire because, at this stage, the smartest way to build is to **outsource outcomes**.

That's it.

I buy results.

I buy momentum.

I buy specialist capability when and where I need it.

And if you're reading this thinking, "That sounds cold," let me reassure you: it’s not cold. It’s efficient. And it’s how business has always behaved when the pressure is real.

This outcome obsession isn’t new. Businesses have been doing it for decades. We just used to hide it behind nicer language.

You know who perfected this? The Big 4 (Google it, I’m not getting cancelled).

Those firms that advise governments and Fortune 500 companies. The ones with glossy slides, crisp suits, and the supernatural ability to turn a simple problem into a six-month “transformation program.”

They are basically the original fractional model, at scale.

Companies don’t hire the Big 4 because they want more staff. They hire them because they want an **outcome** and they want someone else to carry the weight of it.

And yes, some of those firms have recently been in trouble for using AI to write advice. Which is both hilarious and deeply on-brand. But it also proves the point: even in a world where AI can generate words, businesses still pay for “advice” because what they’re really buying is not text.

They’re buying accountability. Risk transfer. Speed. Credibility. A team that can be blamed if it goes wrong. A “we did the right thing” shield. Sometimes they’re buying someone to do the hard work their internal team can’t politically do.

Still outcomes.

Always outcomes.

Companies don’t wake up wanting employees. They wake up wanting problems to stop and growth to happen.

That’s why they spend money on things like:

• More pipeline and qualified meetings.
• Higher conversion rates and shorter sales cycles.
• Launches that don’t flop.
• A clearer message that the market actually understands.
• A brand that attracts customers and talent.
• Lower churn and stronger retention.
• Faster delivery and fewer bottlenecks.
• Better margins and cleaner operations.
• Risk reduced, compliance sorted, disasters avoided.
• A system built once so it doesn’t break every quarter.

That’s the shopping list. Nobody has ever said, “What I really want this year is three more employees and twelve more meetings.”

They want outcomes.

And the best part for you - if you’re selling fractional, or thinking about becoming fractional - is that this is why there will always be opportunity.

Because when a business needs something done quickly, cleanly, and at a high standard, hiring can be the slowest and most expensive option.

Hiring means recruitment, onboarding, management, cultural integration, internal politics, ongoing cost, and the awkward reality that you might hire the wrong person and not realise until you’ve wasted six months and everyone’s pretending it’s fine.

Fractional means: bring in an expert, deliver the outcome, move on.

It’s not “less commitment.” It’s often more commitment, just in a shorter, sharper window, with less theatre.

So this is the moment where I stop poking fun at companies and say something respectful:

Companies aren’t evil for wanting outcomes. They’d be stupid not to.

And if you’re a business owner reading this and you haven’t embraced a fractional approach yet, here’s a very simple exercise for your next growth phase.

Look at what you’re trying to achieve in the next 3–12 months.

Not “what roles you need.” The outcomes.

Then ask yourself:

> Is this really a hire?
>
> Or is this an outcome I could buy faster, better, and with less risk using a fractional specialist?

And one more question that’s going to sting in a useful way:

> Am I looking for availability… or quality?

Because availability is easy to buy. It’s also how you end up with people sitting around looking busy.

Quality is rarer. It’s what actually moves the business.

Fractional is the shortcut to quality, when you can’t afford the time and risk of finding it through hiring.

So yes, I’ve been a bit rough on “companies.”

But if I’m honest, companies are just doing what they’ve always done: chasing outcomes.

The only difference now is that the old method—permanent staff for everything—is getting replaced by something leaner.

And that shift doesn't remove opportunity.

It creates it.

For people who can deliver.

Find Aligned Clients: Building a High-Quality Pipeline

"The future is already here — it's just not evenly distributed."
William Gibson

Building a High-Quality Pipeline from Scratch

At some point in this journey, the romantic part ends and the practical part taps you on the shoulder.

You can have the clearest offer in the world. You can be brilliant. You can know exactly how to create outcomes. You can be a value machine with a slightly alarming work ethic.

But none of it matters if you don't have clients.

And here's where most people get weird.

They leave corporate, decide they're "fractional," and then immediately start doing what corporate trained them to do: wait. Hope. Refresh

LinkedIn. Lurk in comment sections. Post vague thought leadership like "Excited for what's next" and pray someone reads their mind.

No.

You're a business now.

Businesses don't wait to be discovered. They build pipelines. They create flow. They know exactly where the next conversation is coming from, because uncertainty is expensive and cortisol is a terrible business partner.

The good news is you don't need a massive pipeline.

You need a high-quality one.

Aligned clients. Clear outcomes. Real budgets. Decision-makers. Problems you can actually solve. People who want movement, not theatre.

And if you're thinking, "Cool, so where do I find those?"

Before we get into prospecting scripts and outreach tactics, we need to build the list.

Because the list is the game.

If your list is random, your pipeline will be random. If your list is aligned, your pipeline becomes predictable.

So here are the places I'd start, especially if you're going after startups, which, for fractional work, are often the perfect terrain. They move faster. They feel pain more clearly. They buy outcomes because they have to. They don't have the luxury of bureaucracy. They need progress.

Not all startups are good clients, obviously. Some are just chaos in a hoodie. But the ones that are growing, hiring, and trying to win? They're built for fractional specialists.

Now, let's build your list.

The first place is job boards.

Yes, job boards.

Because a job ad is basically a public confession. It tells you what they're struggling with, what outcome they want, and what they're willing to pay to make the pain stop. The language is always dressed up, but it's still obvious.

"We need a Head of Growth" usually means "we don't know how to get customers consistently."

"We need a Sales Manager" usually means "we've got leads but deals keep dying."

"We need an Ops Lead" usually means "we're drowning in complexity and it's slowing everything down."

They're not hiring a person. They're trying to buy an outcome.

Which makes job boards a goldmine for fractional work, because you can approach them with a simpler offer: "You don't need a full-time hire yet. You need this outcome, delivered fast."

The second place is the business papers.

And I know that sounds old-school, but that's the point. Nobody's fighting you for it yet.

Companies show up in the business news for three reasons: they're doing well, they're doing badly, or they paid to be there.

All three usually mean they need outcomes.

If they’re doing well, they’re scaling and bottlenecks are forming. They need systems, sales, operations, marketing, delivery, aka help.

If they’re doing badly, they’re under pressure. They need turnaround outcomes, not more meetings.

If they paid to be there, they’re trying to create momentum. Which means they care about growth, attention, pipeline, brand, demand, aka outcomes.

You’re not reading the business papers for inspiration. You’re reading them like a hunter. Quietly, calmly, looking for signals of need.

The third place is companies that have laid people off.

This is the part of the book where we don’t pretend everything is fine.

Layoffs are a symptom of exactly what we’ve been talking about. Companies are reducing fixed cost. They’re cutting headcount. They’re compressing teams. They’re trying to deliver the same outcomes with fewer staff.

Which creates a gap.

Sometimes the gap is obvious: the work still needs to be done, but nobody owns it anymore.

Sometimes the gap is strategic: “We need to keep growing, but we can’t hire full-time.”

Sometimes it’s emotional: teams are shell-shocked, overloaded, and trying to keep the wheels on.

Those environments need outcomes delivered by specialists who don’t require a full-time seat.

That’s fractional work’s entire reason for existing.

You’re not taking advantage of pain. You’re responding to a market reality. They’ve traded stability for flexibility. Now they need value in a form that fits.

The fourth place is the one that most corporate people forget exists:

You stop networking like an employee and start networking like a business.

No more salespeople selling to salespeople at industry events.

You know the ones. Everyone wearing the same lanyard, everyone claiming to “love connecting,” everyone exchanging cards they’ll never look at again. Free stress balls. Free water bottles. Free tote bags full of brochures nobody asked for. A room full of people who are all trying to sell to each other while pretending it’s “community.”

That’s not networking. That’s a ritual.

You’re a business now. So go where businesses go.

Go to local business networking groups. Founder meetups. Industry breakfasts that aren’t sponsored by a CRM platform. Chamber events. Community business clubs. Creator meetups. Startup demo nights. Trade associations. Co-working spaces. Even sports clubs, honestly, because half the time the best business conversations happen when nobody’s trying to have a business conversation.

And enjoy the freedom of not needing a booth.

You don’t need merch. You don’t need a banner. You don’t need a tagline printed on a polo shirt.

You need a clear outcome you deliver, and a willingness to talk to humans like a human.

This is the mindset shift that makes everything easier: your pipeline isn't built through "selling."

It's built through being findable in the right rooms.

And the right rooms aren't always online. In fact, some of the best rooms are offline now, because everyone is exhausted by digital noise and desperate for real-world trust again.

So your job this week isn't to perfect your pitch.

It's to build your list.

Open a doc. Create a simple pipeline list. Put names in it.

Companies hiring for outcomes. Companies in the news. Companies recovering from layoffs. People you meet in real-world business rooms.

Then, and only then, do we talk about prospecting. Because prospecting without an aligned list is just you yelling into the void and calling it "sales."

In the next chapter, we'll build the pipeline from scratch: how to reach out without sounding desperate, how to offer outcomes without overpromising, and how to get meetings with people who actually have a budget and a problem worth solving.

The First Fractional Client: From Panic to Pipeline

"The best way to predict the future is to invent it."

Alan Kay

My first fractional client didn't start as a fractional client.

It started as a favour.

A mutual connection hit me up and basically said, "Hey, can you meet this guy? He's building a SaaS startup and he's looking to fill a role. Just have a chat."

And that matters. Not because it's a cute origin story, but because this is how a lot of your early fractional work will appear if you're paying attention. Not through some formal application process. Not through a portal. Through a human bridge.

So, I did. Not because I was looking for work, but because it was a favour. Also, because I'm a sucker for a café meeting that feels like it might accidentally turn into something interesting.

We met in a café. Two coffees, a small table, and a founder across from me with that startup vibe: excited, slightly haunted, and talking fast like the business is either about to explode or evaporate. Possibly both.

He started pitching me a job.

Title. Responsibilities. The whole "we need someone who can…" routine. And I'm listening, nodding politely, doing the normal human thing… except it was awkward.

Because I genuinely couldn't tell who was pitching who.

He thought he was interviewing me.

I thought I was doing a favour.

My ego thought I was above it all because I'd just left corporate on a high and still had that post-exit swagger. Not the cringe kind. The calm kind. The kind where you're not desperate, so you accidentally become 40% more attractive as a candidate.

And to complicate it further, our second company was launching at the time, so my calendar wasn't exactly empty. I didn't have the space for a full-time role even if I'd wanted it. Which I didn't. Mostly.

So there I am, in a café, being "pitched a job" while mentally thinking, mate… I can't even commit to next Thursday right now.

Now here's the part I want to say clearly, because it matters for anyone reading this thinking, "Cool story, but I don't know how to do that."

I didn't have any of this nailed down.

I wasn't sitting there as some polished fractional wizard with a neat framework and a perfectly packaged offer. I didn't even have the language. I had a vague sense that corporate thinking was leaking out of my ears and a suspicion that selling outcomes made more sense than selling hours.

That's it.

This meeting was me learning, in real time, how to shift into a business owner mindset… while pretending I was just there for a chat.

But because I wasn't hungry for the job, something useful happened: I could actually think clearly.

And somewhere in the middle of his pitch, I shifted gears without announcing it.

I stopped listening like a candidate.

And I started listening like a consultant.

Which is basically just a fancy way of saying: I stopped caring about the role and started caring about what was broken.

I started asking the questions that job interviews usually avoid because they make things too real.

What's actually not working right now?

Where are you stuck?

What have you tried already?

What would a win look like in the next 90 days?

How would you measure it without hand-waving?

What happens if you don't solve this?

And you could feel the whole energy change.

Founders don't wake up wanting headcount. They wake up wanting the pain to stop. So when someone across from them starts naming the pain and pointing at outcomes, it's like a window opens in the room.

Then the penny dropped for me... mid-coffee, mid-chat, still not "fractional-ready," still making it up as I went.

He wasn't really describing a role.

He was describing an outcome disguised as a job.

He didn't need "a person."

He needed pipeline. Deals. Momentum. Progress. Something moving, quickly, because in startup land, "we'll fix it next quarter" is basically a death wish.

So I said something that, at the time, felt like stepping off a ledge.

Something like: "It sounds like you need this outcome. I'm not sure you need a full-time hire to get it. We could structure this as a short engagement focused on results."

There was a pause.

Not an awkward pause. A processing pause. The kind where someone realises they've been trying to solve the right problem with the wrong buying behaviour.

And that's the moment the "job interview" stopped being a job interview.

Because suddenly we weren't talking about salary and titles.

We were talking about outcomes, timelines, and what success would actually look like.

And I need you to understand why this matters: this wasn't me executing a perfect plan. This was me practicing a shift.

From employee thinking to business owner thinking.

From "please choose me" to "what do you need to achieve?"

From "my experience is…" to "here's what I can change."

From “what’s the package?” to “what’s the outcome worth?”

That shift is the whole game.

And here’s the practical advice buried inside this awkward café moment:

Don’t hunt for jobs or “work.”

Hunt for signals.

Signals that match your packaging and your unique advantage. Signals that a business is trying to buy an outcome but defaulting to hiring because that’s the only language they know.

A job ad is a public confession of pain.

A founder “interviewing” you is often a founder trying to stop something bleeding.

A mutual connection saying “just have a chat” is often a door.

Most business owners and leaders will appreciate the focus on outcomes over remuneration. Not because money doesn’t matter, but because clarity matters more. They want results. They want momentum. They want relief.

So my first fractional client didn’t come from a polished launch.

It came from a favour, a café table, and a very awkward question hanging in the air:

Wait… who’s pitching who?

And that’s exactly how the fractional life starts sometimes.

Not with certainty.

With a conversation that suddenly turns into a deal.

From Panic to Pipeline

In the early days of fractional work, there's a moment that hits almost everyone. You've made the decision, even if it's only in your head. You can see the shape of the new life. You can almost feel the freedom. And then, usually at 2:17am, your brain sits up in bed and says, "Cool. So, who's paying you?"

That's the panic phase. It's not dramatic. It's not a breakdown. It's more like a low-level hum in your chest that follows you around while you pretend you're fine. You start doing "productive" things, but if we're honest, it's mostly emotional self-soothing disguised as action.

This is where a lot of people sprint to LinkedIn and socials, because it feels like the obvious move. They update the headline. They make the "excited for what's next" post. They wait for the world to respond with a flood of clients and applause.

And then nothing happens. Or a few people like it, and your aunt comments "So proud of you!" and you're still sitting there wondering how rent works.

The truth is, early days, LinkedIn and socials are not your client list. They're not a magical ATM. They're not where you post once and suddenly your calendar fills with paid work.

They're where you find your other Avengers. Or your other Voltron robots, if that's more your thing.

What I mean is, socials are where you find the people who can cover your gaps. The people who make you stronger, safer, and more deliverable.

Because fractional work starts as a solo move, but it rarely stays solo if you want it to scale without burning you out.

If you want a clean mental model for this, look at tradespeople.

An electrician doesn't try to be a plumber. A plumber doesn't try to be a scaffolder. A scaffolder doesn't suddenly decide, "You know what, I'll also do tiling, because I'm here." They know their lane. They do it well. And then they refer the rest.

They also work together like it's normal, because it is normal.

One job leads to another job. One trade brings in the next trade. The builder has their crew. The crew has their mates. And referrals fly around constantly because trust is everything. If you're a good sparkie, people want you on their jobs. If you're a good plumber, your name gets passed around like contraband. If you show up, do what you said you'd do, and don't leave the place looking like a tornado hit it, you become a "go-to."

That's pipeline. That's how it's always been built.

And after the work's done, they all meet up for a 2pm chicken parmigiana like it's a sacred ritual. Which, honestly, it is. No spreadsheets. No LinkedIn posts. Just results, reputation, and a pub meal that says, "We built something today."

That's the energy you're trying to bring into white-collar fractional work.

You're not trying to become a lone wolf consultant hero. You're building a network of specialists who refer work to each other, collaborate when needed, and make each other more valuable by association.

So as you start building your list of potential clients, you also want to start building your cabinet. You want to meet the people who do what you don't do, or what you don't want to do. You want to surround yourself with specialists, so you can keep your offers clean and your delivery sharp.

If you know visuals matter, you want a photographer or videographer you trust. Not someone you hire once and never speak to again, but someone who understands your work and can help you show it properly.

If you can deliver outcomes but you hate marketing yourself, you want a marketer who can package you and your offer without turning you into a cringe “personal brand” character.

If you can close deals but you don’t want to run operations, you want an ops person who loves systems and can make everything smoother.

If you can deliver all day but selling makes you feel slightly sick, you want a salesperson or business development person who enjoys opening doors.

These people are out there. And they’re often easier to find than clients at the start, because they’re also building. They’re also looking for allies. They’re also trying to escape the old model without feeling like they’re doing it alone.

This is why pipeline isn’t just a list of leads.

Pipeline is a series of conversations.

It’s people who know what you do and what outcomes you deliver. It’s relationships that keep coming back around because the world is smaller than you think when you do good work. It’s one chat that turns into another chat that turns into an introduction that turns into a deal.

One of the best examples of this in my own world is an old client who eventually became a business partner.
He was an investment banker, and he saw my value in the cleanest possible way. Not as a “consultant,” not as a nice guy to have around, but as someone who could help businesses grow. To him that meant one thing: increasing shareholder value.

If a business moves, value moves. If growth happens, value moves. If deals close, value moves. He understood that, and because he understood that, he understood my worth.

That relationship didn't start with a post. It started with conversations. Trust. Outcomes delivered over time. The boring, human way.

This is also why I'm asking you not to blast your connections on day one with your "new self." Don't do the panic announcement and then treat your network like a vending machine. I get the temptation. The anxiety is loud. You want certainty. You want traction. You want someone to say, "We've been waiting for you."

But most people don't know what to do with a vague announcement. "I'm now consulting" means nothing to them. It's not an outcome. It's just a new label.

Start smaller. Start quieter. Start like a business.

Have conversations. Real ones. Individual ones. Tell people what you're building and what outcomes you're aiming to deliver. Ask what they're seeing in the market. Ask what problems are showing up. Ask who's hiring, who's scaling, who's stuck, who's quietly panicking. Ask who they know that might need what you do.

And while you do that, keep an eye out for your Avengers. Build your cabinet while you build your list. Those relationships will make you more capable, more confident, and more referable. They'll also stop you from feeling like you're trying to build a whole life with nothing but grit and caffeine.

Panic doesn't disappear when you magically get ten clients. Panic disappears when you have movement. When you have momentum. When you have conversations booked. When you have signals coming in. When you're no longer alone in your own head.

That’s what a pipeline really is. Not a funnel. Not a spreadsheet. Not a viral post.

A living network of conversations that keeps your work flowing.

So if you’re in the panic stage right now, don’t announce anything dramatic. Don’t reinvent yourself overnight. Don’t ask your network to “keep you in mind.”

Have five good conversations first. Let those conversations become the beginning of your pipeline. The kind that actually lasts.

Thrive as Fractional: Negotiation, Delivery, and Growth

“Playing dumb is a valid negotiating technique.”
Chris Voss

Negotiation Mastery for Fractional Executives

I’m not an expert on negotiations. I’m just fucking great at it, here is what has worked for me – so CTRL + C then CTRL + V (cut and paste for the PC people... ew).

And if you’ve survived corporate long enough to read this book, you probably are too. You’ve negotiated budgets, timelines, stakeholders, procurement, internal politics, and that one exec who treats every meeting like a cage fight. You know how to hold a frame.

The problem is your negotiation muscle has mostly been trained inside employment logic. Salary. Title. Bonus. Benefits. Annual review theatre. It’s a specific sport, played on a specific field.

Fractional negotiation is a different sport.

You’re not negotiating to be chosen. You’re negotiating how value gets bought. You’re not fighting for a seat. You’re defining a commercial relationship. That shift is where your leverage lives.

So here are the tactics, plus the examples and templates, in the language you can actually use.

The Core Reframe You’ll Use All the Time

When someone asks the classic employee question:

> "How many hours a week will you do?"

You answer like a fractional person:

> "I don't sell hours. I sell outcomes. My time is the delivery mechanism, but the thing you're buying is the result."

Then you give them the replacement question:

> "Let's define what 'done' looks like, and then we'll structure the engagement around that."

That one move will save you months of being dragged into staff mode.

1) Time Negotiation: Sell Access, Not Availability

In employment, "availability" is the product. In fractional work, "access" is the lever.

Example: Client wants you 'on call'

Client: "We'll need you available whenever things come up."

You: "I can do an access retainer if you want responsiveness and ad-hoc support. If you want a specific outcome, we'll package it as a project with clear deliverables."

Example: Client pushes for a weekly hours commitment

Client: "Can you commit to 20 hours a week?"

You: “If you need staff-level capacity, that’s a different engagement. For outcome work, I commit to milestones and timeframes, not hours. Typically it’s 3–5 focused hours a week, but the promise is delivery of X by Y.”

Template: Access options menu (simple, non-cringe)

> “I generally offer two engagement styles:
> 1. **Outcome Sprint** (fixed scope, fixed timeframe)
> 2. **Access Retainer** (reserved capacity for ad-hoc needs)
>
> Which one fits what you’re trying to achieve?”

Template: Response time boundary

> “For retainers, I work with a simple response SLA:
>
> > – Same day for urgent items (if it’s actually urgent)
> >
> > – 24–48 hours for everything else
>
> If you need real-time access, we can keep it clean with a premium tier.”

2) Payment Terms: Get Paid Like a Business

Your corporate brain thinks being paid upfront is “rude.”

Your business brain knows it’s normal.

You’re reserving capacity, taking on risk, and committing to outcomes. That’s why retainers exist.

Default payment structures that work:

• Monthly in advance (simplest)
• 50% upfront / 50% on milestone
• Weekly invoicing (when cashflow matters)
• Net 7 / Net 14 (avoid Net 30+ early days)

Example: Client asks for Net 60

Client: “Our terms are Net 60.”

You: “I get it. For new engagements I start on Net 7 / monthly upfront. If Net 60 is non-negotiable, I can do that with a higher base fee because it becomes a financing cost.”

Template: Payment terms line you can paste into proposals

> “Billing is monthly in advance. Payment terms are Net 7. Work commences on receipt of first invoice.”

Template: Polite but firm start condition

> “To lock in the start date, I’ll send the first invoice today. Once that’s paid, I’ll book the kickoff and we’ll move.”

3) Outcomes Over Hours: Define Success Like an Adult

Most scope creep comes from vague success.

So you negotiate measurable success early, then attach the deal to that.

Examples of outcome metrics by domain

Sales / Growth

• Qualified meetings booked per week/month
• Pipeline created ($ value)
• Sales cycle reduced (days)
• Win rate improved (%)
• Conversion rate improved (%)

Marketing

• Landing page conversion improvement
• Cost per lead reduction
• Content system shipped (cadence + assets)
• Email funnel built and launched
• Positioning message clarity (measured by conversion/response)

Ops

• Time saved per team per week
• Process cycle time reduced
• Automation shipped and adopted
• Reporting reduced from X hours to Y
• Onboarding time reduced

Template: Outcome definition paragraph

> "Success for this engagement is defined as:
> 1. [Metric 1] improving from [baseline] to [target]
> 2. [Metric 2] achieved by [date]
> 3. [Deliverable artifact] delivered and implemented"

Template: The 'control' clause (avoids being blamed for their chaos)

> "Outcomes depend on timely access to data, systems, and decision-makers. If inputs are delayed, timelines and targets may be adjusted accordingly."

That sentence is your insurance policy.

4) Retainers: Two Models and When to Use Them

Retainers are fine. The wrong retainers are not.

A) Access Retainer (capacity)

You're paid to reserve time.

Good for: ongoing leadership, coaching, ad-hoc support, steady improvements

Needs: boundaries

Example offer

> "$4,000/month for up to 4 hours/week reserved capacity, plus one weekly call, plus async support."

Template: What's included / excluded

> "Included: weekly planning call, async support, execution on agreed priorities.
>
> Excluded: full-time availability, weekend support, urgent same-hour work unless pre-agreed."

B) Outcome Retainer (rolling outcomes)

You're paid to keep delivering a stream of outcomes.

Good for: sales engines, growth systems, ongoing optimisation

Needs: monthly goals

Example offer

> "$6,000/month for 90 days to build and run outbound: ICP list, messaging, sequences, weekly reporting, and meeting targets."

Template: Monthly cadence

> "Each month we agree a 'monthly win' outcome, then execute weekly. At month-end we review metrics and reset priorities."

5) Commissions and Payouts: Performance Without Gambling

Commission is great when you can influence the result.

Commission-only is how you end up doing unpaid work while someone "thinks about it."

Best-practice structure: Base + upside

Example: Sales engagement

- Base: $1,000/week
- Commission: 30% of gross profit on closed deals for 90 days from close

Template: Commission definition block

> "Commission applies to deals:
>
> – Introduced or influenced by my outreach and sales process

– Closed during the engagement or within 60 days after

– Commission calculated on [booked revenue / collected revenue / gross profit]

– Paid within 7 days of client receiving payment”

Milestone payout examples

• “$2,500 bonus when we hit 10 qualified meetings booked in a month”
• “$5,000 bonus when pipeline created hits $250k”
• “$3,000 bonus when conversion rate improves from 2% to 3% and holds for 30 days”

Template: Tiered bonus (simple)

“If we hit:

– 6 meetings/month: bonus $X

– 10 meetings/month: bonus $Y

– 14 meetings/month: bonus $Z”

This keeps incentives aligned without you having to audit their CRM like a detective.

6) Scope Negotiation: The Cleanest Phrase You'll Ever Use

The key to scope isn't "no."

It's trade-offs.

Example: Client adds work midstream

Client: "Can you also run our partner program?"

You: "Yes, we can add that. We'll either remove something from the current scope, extend the timeline, or adjust the fee. Which do you prefer?"

You've just avoided resentment and protected the deal without sounding difficult.

Template: Scope change clause (human language)

"Anything outside scope can be added, but it will require either a change in timeframe or fee. We'll confirm in writing before starting extra work."

7) Timeframes: Use Deadlines as Leverage

In corporate, deadlines create panic.

In fractional, deadlines create clarity.

Example: Speed vs access negotiation

"We can deliver this in 6 weeks if we have access to X and Y, and decisions are made within 48 hours. If access is slower, it becomes a 10–12 week engagement."

This makes them part of the delivery system.

Template: Assumptions list

> “This engagement assumes:
>
> – Access to CRM and reporting within 3 days
>
> – A single decision-maker on the client side
>
> – Weekly 30-minute review call
>
> – Feedback turnaround within 48 hours”

If they can’t meet those assumptions, the deal changes. Calmly.

8) The Proposal One-Pager Templates

Template 1: Outcome Sprint (copy/paste)

Outcome:

We will achieve [specific outcome] for [company] by [date].

Duration:

[X weeks], starting [date].

Deliverables:

– [Artifact 1]

– [Artifact 2]

– [Artifact 3]

Success Metrics:

– [Metric] from [baseline] to [target]

– [Metric] achieved by [date]

Investment:

Base fee: $[X] (paid [upfront/monthly])

Performance bonus: $[Y] when [trigger]

Assumptions:

Access to [systems/data], weekly check-in, decision-maker availability.

Out of Scope:

[List 2–3 things you won't do]

Template 2: Access Retainer (copy/paste)

Purpose:

Reserved capacity for [area] to support [outcome].

Term:

Month-to-month, with 30 days notice.

Capacity:

Up to [X] hours/week, scheduled in advance.

Included:

Weekly call, async support, execution on agreed priorities.

Excluded:

Real-time availability, weekend support, full rebuilds without scope change.

Investment:

$[X]/month paid in advance. Net 7.

9) Contrarian Close: Don't Negotiate Like an Employee

In employment, you negotiate to reduce risk.

In fractional work, you negotiate to create clean delivery.

That means you're allowed to:

- ask for upfront payment
- set response-time boundaries
- define scope like a grown-up
- tie upside to outcomes
- walk away from deals that turn you into staff with an invoice

And the biggest mind-bender: it's normal to have multiple engagements.

You're not "cheating." You're operating like every good tradesperson does. Multiple jobs, overlapping projects, referrals, reputation, repeat work. That's not instability. That's pipeline.

If you want one line to keep in your back pocket for almost every negotiation, it's this:

"I'm happy to structure this in a way that feels safe for you, but it has to be structured in a way that lets me deliver the outcome cleanly."

That's mastery. Professional, calm, and quietly unmovable.

Oh and smile when you compose these, not sure how it works, but they will notice...

Building the Contractor Cabinet: Forming Your Support Network

“Autobots, roll out!”
Optimus Prime

Building the Contractor Cabinet

We’ve touched on this already, but it deserves its own chapter because it’s one of the biggest reasons fractional work either becomes a thriving, flexible career… or a lonely, stressful grind where you feel like you have to be everything for everyone.

You’re not just building a pipeline of clients. You’re building a cabinet.

A contractor cabinet is your crew of trusted specialists. The people you can refer to, pull into deals, partner with, and lean on when a client needs something outside your lane. It’s also the group that makes this life feel less like “me versus the world” and more like a network that actually has your back.

If you’re coming from corporate, you might not realise how much the built-in team structure protected you. Even when corporate was annoying, you had people. You had the person you could Slack with to sanity-check something. You had someone in finance who knew how to get things done. You had a designer who made you look good. You had a closer who could land the deal. You had the ops person who quietly saved everyone’s life weekly and never got the credit.

Fractional work takes away the org chart. That’s the freedom. But it also removes the default support network. That’s the risk.

So you rebuild it on purpose.

The best model for this isn’t another LinkedIn “networking strategy.” It’s tradespeople. Again.

Electricians, plumbers, scaffolders, tilers, builders—none of them pretend they do everything. They know their lane. They do it well. They refer the rest. Their whole world runs on reputation and relationships. They subcontract. They share work. They warn each other about nightmare clients. They pull each other onto jobs.

Then they go for beers like a sacred tradition and pretend they’re not talking shop while absolutely talking shop.

That is the contractor cabinet mindset. You’re building the white-collar version of that.

And here’s the good news: other fractionals will most likely appreciate the connection.

Because they’re building too. They’re trying to reduce risk too. They want people they can recommend without fear. They want partners who make them look good. They want a steady flow of work that doesn’t require them to post inspirational content every morning to summon clients.

A cabinet gives you three very practical advantages.

First, it expands what you can deliver without expanding what you personally have to do. You stop saying, “Sorry, I can’t help,” and start saying, “Yes, here’s how we do that.” That makes you more valuable, not less. You become a problem-solver, not just a specialist.

Second, it stabilises your income. Referrals go both ways. You get work when someone else is too busy. You pass work when it’s not your lane. You stop living on the emotional rollercoaster of “I have three clients” followed by “I have none.”

Third, it reduces the mental load. When you’re stressed, you don’t need a quote. You need a person. Someone who understands the weirdness of being independent, the anxiety spikes, the pricing doubts, the client politics, the “should I fire them?” moments. Cabinet people keep you sane.

Now, let’s make this actionable. Here’s how you actually build it.

You start by identifying your gaps. Not in a shameful way. In a strategic way. You’re a business now. Businesses have gaps. That’s normal.

Ask yourself: when I deliver outcomes, where do I consistently hit friction?

Maybe you’re great at strategy but hate execution. Maybe you can sell but you don’t want to run operations. Maybe you can deliver but you freeze in prospecting. Maybe you can market but you can’t design. Maybe you can build a plan but you hate copywriting. Maybe you can do the work but you can’t package it.

Those gaps are not weaknesses. They’re cabinet opportunities.

Then you look for complementary roles. This is what I mean by “adjacent, not identical.” You don’t need five people who do exactly what you do. You need people who complete the picture.

A simple cabinet starter pack looks like this:

A photographer or videographer who can make work look real and premium.

A designer who can turn ideas into assets.

A marketer who understands demand and messaging.

An ops person who loves systems and removes friction.

A salesperson or business development person who opens doors.

A finance person who can sanity-check pricing and structure.

That sounds like a lot, but you don't need them all at once. You build the cabinet over time. One strong connection per month and you'll have a powerful crew in a year.

The next step is reaching out. And this is where most people get awkward, because they think they're "networking," and networking has been ruined by people who treat humans like lead lists.

So don't do that.

Reach out like you're inviting someone into a crew, not into a funnel.

The easiest way is to start with respect and specificity. You're not asking for a favour. You're opening a relationship.

"I keep seeing your work and it's high quality. I'm building my fractional practice and I'm putting together a small cabinet of people I can trust. Want to grab a coffee and swap notes? No pitch, just getting to know good operators."

That's it. Keep it human.

Then, when you meet, don't make it weird. You're not there to impress them. You're there to see if your standards match.

Talk about how you work. What clients you like. What outcomes you deliver. What kind of projects you're trying to avoid. How you price. What red flags you've learned. Where you think the market is heading.

If you both leave the conversation thinking, “That person gets it,” you’ve found someone worth keeping close.

Now, here’s the part that turns a cabinet into an agency, without you even meaning to build an agency.

It’s a consulting concept called co-priming.

Co-priming is when you introduce a specialist into a relationship early, not later, so the client begins to see you as a team, not a solo operator. You’re priming the client to think in outcomes and capability, not in “one person who can do everything.”

This is powerful because it changes the frame.

Instead of you saying, “I can do that too,” you say, “We can cover that.”

And “we” is a different kind of confidence. It feels safer to buyers. It feels more scalable. It feels more like a professional solution.

Here’s a real example.

Let’s say a client wants growth. They need pipeline. They also need better positioning and assets. If you try to do it all, you become a bottleneck and your work gets watered down.

Instead, you bring in your marketer or designer early.

You say, “For this to work, we need two tracks running in parallel: pipeline execution and messaging clarity. I’ll lead the engagement and own the outcome, and I’ll bring in someone I trust for the creative/messaging piece. You’ll get faster progress and fewer blind spots.”

That’s co-priming.

You're not handing the client off. You're expanding the delivery team while keeping accountability clean.

You're also teaching the client how to buy outcomes properly. They stop thinking like "hire one person." They start thinking like "assemble the right team."

And this is how agencies accidentally begin.

Not with a grand plan. With repeatable outcomes, a trusted cabinet, and a few deals where you pitch and deliver as a team.

If you want to pitch as a team without making it formal, keep it simple.

You lead. You keep the relationship. You own the outcome. You bring the specialist into the call for the parts that are theirs. You don't pretend they're your employee. You treat them like a partner. The client sees competence and coordination, and that's what they actually want anyway.

Over time, something subtle happens. Clients stop saying, "Can you help with this?"

They start saying, "Do you have someone who can…"

And that's the moment you know you're building real leverage.

Because a cabinet isn't just a nice idea. It's a business model.

It's how you take the best parts of corporate, teamwork, standards, capability, and move them outside, into the wild, without the bureaucracy.

You get to be professional. You get to deliver real outcomes. You get to build a reputation. You get to have a crew.

And if you do it right, you also get to have beers (or kombucha) at 2pm sometimes, like a proper tradie, because honestly, that might be the best KPI of all.

Referrals and Case Studies

"I know a guy who knows a guy…who knows another guy"
Saul Goodman

Building Pipeline While you Sleep

One of the weirdest parts of going fractional is realising how much of your professional credibility used to be borrowed. Borrowed from a brand name, a job title, a company logo, a manager's endorsement. None of that made you less capable, but it did make you less visible. The proof existed, it just lived inside the walls.

When you step outside, the proof has to come with you.

And that's where referrals and case studies stop being "nice to have" and become part of the business model. They're not marketing fluff. They're trust, transferred. They're the difference between your next deal being a cold start and your next deal being a warm yes.

In the early days, proof is often the thing you're missing. Or you have it, but it's locked behind NDAs and corporate secrecy and the awkward reality that you can't exactly publish your old employer's internal slide deck, even if it was your finest work and honestly should be displayed in a museum.

So you build proof on purpose. You treat it like a deliverable. You negotiate for it the same way you negotiate for money, because it has value. In some cases, it has more value than margin.

This is the part where I want you to get comfortable with a trade that feels slightly naughty if your brain is still stuck in employee mode. You can reduce your margin in exchange for a reference or a case study. You can say, in plain language, “Help me out, and I’ll make it worth your while.” That isn’t desperation. That’s strategy. You’re not discounting because you’re weak. You’re buying something that will create future pipeline.

The difference is how you do it. You don’t ask like a teenager asking to borrow the car. You offer it like a business making a commercial exchange.

If a client is high-value for reputation or network, you can say something like, “My standard fee is X. If you’re open to being a reference and letting me write a short case study after we hit the outcome, I can sharpen the fee to Y.” You’re not pleading. You’re presenting options. The client can choose the standard fee with no strings, or the lower fee with proof as part of the package.

Most leaders understand this immediately, because they do it too. They sponsor things for exposure. They discount for volume. They trade pricing for risk reduction. This is normal business behaviour. It only feels strange when you’ve been trained to believe money is the only thing that can be negotiated.

The important part is to bring it up early. Don’t wait until the end of the engagement when everyone is busy, tired, and moving on. If you want a referral or a case study, plant the flag at the start. When you bake it into the arrangement, it doesn’t feel like an awkward favour later. It feels like part of the deal.

It also helps to define what you actually mean by “a case study,” because people imagine it’s a giant marketing document and immediately want to run away. You’re not asking them to co-author a novel. The best case study in the early days is a simple before-and-after story. What was happening before, what you did, what changed, and what the numbers looked like. If numbers are sensitive, ranges are fine. “Pipeline increased” can become “pipeline increased by approximately 20–30%.” Nobody is auditing you. They’re looking for credibility.

You make it easy by offering a simple process. You can tell them that you'll do the work. You'll ask a few questions, write it up, and send it for approval. If they prefer, you can do a ten-minute call, record it, and pull a short quote from it. If they'd rather keep it even simpler, a LinkedIn recommendation works. A two-to-four sentence testimonial works. A willingness to take one reference call works. You can give them choices, because choice reduces friction.

If you want this to actually happen, don't rely on goodwill alone. Put it in writing in a clean, human way. It can be as simple as saying that after successful completion, the client will provide one testimonial or one LinkedIn recommendation within fourteen days, or agree to a short case study interview. That's not being legalistic. That's being clear. People are busy, and good intentions are not a system.

Referrals work the same way. Most people never ask. They hope. They hint. They post. They wait. Then they quietly resent their network for not reading their mind. Don't do that. Referral asks are normal in any business. The only reason they feel awkward is because you were trained to believe that "asking" is unprofessional. It isn't. Asking vaguely is unprofessional. Asking clearly is respectful.

The key is to ask in a way that makes it easy for someone to say yes. A vague "If you know anyone, let me know" is lazy. It puts all the work on them. A good referral ask gives them a picture.

After you've delivered a win, you can say, "This went well. If you know one other founder or leader dealing with the same problem, I'd love an intro." You can make it even easier by being specific: "If you know anyone trying to build pipeline in the next quarter, I'm useful there." Specificity turns your ask from a general wish into something their brain can actually scan for.

Sometimes the best approach is to follow up with a short note that describes your ideal referral in plain language. One paragraph. Who you help, what outcomes you deliver, and what kind of signal suggests someone needs you. That makes the referral ask feel like a practical action, not a social favour.

There's another reason referrals and case studies matter, and it's one people don't think about early enough. They help with negotiation. When you have proof, you don't need to argue for your value. You can show it. A simple case study changes the tone of a pricing conversation because you're no longer a risk. You're a pattern. "This person has done this before. This is what happened."

And if you don't have that proof yet, this is where the trade becomes even more valuable. You're not discounting forever. You're investing in the receipts that will let you charge full price later. You're building the assets that make your pipeline easier, your conversion higher, and your income more stable.

So here's the mindset I want you to carry: referrals and case studies aren't a bonus at the end. They're part of the engagement. If a client wants a lower price, you can trade margin for proof. If a client wants your best work, you can also ask for proof because your best work deserves to be visible.

Be brave enough to ask, but stay professional. Keep it simple. Make it easy. Put it in writing. Then deliver like your reputation depends on it, because it does.

Once you have a few strong references and a handful of case studies, the game changes. You stop feeling like you're starting from scratch every time. You stop needing to convince. You start being recognised. And that, more than anything, is what turns fractional work from a scary experiment into a stable life.

How to Bring It Up Without Making It Weird

Do it during the deal, not after the win. After the win everyone disappears into “busy” again.

Here are clean lines you can use:

Option 1: Straight trade

“My standard fee is $X. If you’re open to a short case study and being a reference once we hit the outcome, I can do $Y.”

Option 2: If they ask for a discount

“I can sharpen price if we trade for proof. That would mean a testimonial or a short case study at the end. If you’d rather keep it private, no problem—we stay at $X.”

Option 3: Calm and honest

“I’m building my fractional practice and I’m deliberately collecting proof. If you’re comfortable being a reference, it’s worth a lot to me and I’ll reflect that in the fee.”

Put It in Writing (So It Actually Happens)

Good intentions are cute. They’re not a system.

Add a simple line to your agreement:

“Upon successful completion, client agrees within 14 days to provide one of the following:

(a) a written testimonial, (b) a LinkedIn recommendation, (c) a 10–15 minute case study interview, or (d) availability for up to 2 reference calls.”

That’s not aggressive. It’s clear.**Referral Asks: Don’t Be Vague**

Most people don’t refer because they can’t picture who to refer.

So don’t say: “If you know anyone…”

Say something they can actually scan their brain for.

Use these:

After a win

“This went well. If you know one other founder dealing with [same problem], I’d love an intro.”

Make it specific

“Who do you know trying to improve pipeline this quarter? One intro would mean a lot.”

Give them a script they can forward

“I’ll send you a two-paragraph note you can forward if anyone comes to mind.”

Here’s the note template:

“Hey [Name], I’ve been working with [Client] on [outcome]. We achieved [result]. If you’re dealing with something similar, happy to share what worked and see if it’s useful.”

Short. Non-salesy. Outcome-led.

Case Study Structure (One-Page, Not a Novel)

This is all you need:

- Before: what was broken
- Goal: what outcome we aimed for

• What we did: 3–5 key moves
• After: what changed (numbers or ranges)
• Quote: 1–2 sentences from client

That's it. One page. Clean. Believable.

A Simple "Ask" Script (Use This on Calls)

"This is the outcome I'm confident we can hit in the next 60–90 days. The fee is $X.

If you're open to being a reference and allowing a short case study once we hit it, I can bring that down to $Y.

Either way works—I just want to be upfront about the trade."

Professional. Calm. No begging.

Why This Matters

Referrals and case studies do three things:

• They reduce your dependence on cold outreach
• They increase your pricing power
• They make negotiations easier because you're no longer a mystery

So don't treat proof like a bonus.

Treat it like part of the deal.

The Freelance Marketer's Collective Awakening

If there's one group that quietly pioneered the fractional movement, it's freelance marketers.

Not because they're "better" humans. Mostly because marketing has always lived closer to the market's mood swings. When budgets tighten, marketing gets blamed. When growth is needed, marketing gets begged. When results happen, everyone says "great team effort" and then immediately asks for a slide deck explaining why it worked.

So marketers adapted early. They went independent early. They learned to sell outcomes early. They learned to build reputations without a company logo propping them up. And a lot of the people leading that charge have been women; because, globally, women make up a significant share of business ownership and entrepreneurial activity, even while still facing structural friction. The World Bank reports that around one in three firms worldwide have female participation in ownership. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor's women's entrepreneurship reporting also shows women's startup activity rising over time, with "about one in ten women" starting new businesses in recent years across the countries surveyed.

Now, this chapter isn't a victory lap. It's a field guide. Because marketers figured out a few things that corporate professionals often struggle with when they go fractional.

The first is confidence, but not the loud kind. The practical kind.

Freelance marketers don't wait to be "ready" before they start operating like businesses. They don't need permission to call themselves what they are. They don't spend six months perfecting a bio and then panicking when nobody buys. They get a first client, do great work, and let reality build the confidence for them. It’s less “manifestation,” more “deliver and stack receipts.”

The second is community.

This is the part corporate people underestimate. In corporate, community is built in. You’re forced into it by org charts and meetings and shared suffering. When you leave, you think you’ll keep the same sense of belonging, and then suddenly you’re sitting at your kitchen table negotiating payment terms with yourself like you’re two different people.

Freelance marketers don’t do the lone-wolf thing for long. They form pods. They share leads. They refer work. They subcontract. They co-deliver. They sanity-check pricing. They warn each other about clients who “move fast” (translation: chaotic and broke). They create a little economy of trust that makes everyone stronger.

And the third thing they nailed is standards.

The best freelance marketers don’t compete on availability. They compete on quality. They’re not trying to be “on call” like staff. They’re trying to be valuable enough that clients adapt to their process. That’s a subtle power move, and it changes everything. When you’re selling outcomes, you’re allowed to design how outcomes get delivered.

So what can you learn from this, even if you’re not a marketer?

Start with this: your pipeline isn’t just clients. It’s allies.

If you only use LinkedIn to hunt for customers, you’ll burn out. If you use it to build a cabinet—people who complement you—you’ll start operating like a proper contractor ecosystem. Marketers do this naturally. They find designers, videographers, copywriters, paid media operators, SEO specialists, brand strategists, web builders, ops people, and salespeople. They don’t try to become all of them. They collect them.

Then they pitch as a team when needed, even if it's informal. **"I'll lead the engagement, and I'll bring in someone I trust for X."** That single sentence turns you from "a person" into "a solution."

You should steal that.

Another lesson: marketers tend to speak in outcomes because they have to. A CEO doesn't want "content." They want demand. They don't want "brand awareness." They want pricing power. They don't want "engagement." They want pipeline.

So build your own outcome translation.

Whatever you do—sales, ops, finance, product, leadership—translate it into what the business actually wants. More revenue. Less churn. Faster cycles. Lower risk. Higher margin. Better retention. Better execution. Cleaner operations. Stronger positioning. Fewer fires.

This is why marketers thrive in the fractional world. They're used to being judged by impact, not effort. They don't get rewarded for being busy. They get rewarded for moving the needle.

And finally, learn the vibe of the whole thing: professional, but in the wild.

Freelance marketers didn't abandon professionalism. They just stopped pretending professionalism requires permission slips and office lighting. They're still sharp. They still run proper processes. They still deliver high-level work. They just do it outside the cage, with more autonomy and often more joy.

That's the point of this chapter.

Not "go be a marketer."

Go learn from the group that has already proven something important: you can do serious work, at a high standard, with a strong community around you, without living inside employment forever.

And once you see that model working; once you see the confidence, the community, and the quality, it becomes hard to unsee.

It's not just possible.

It's already happening.

A Love Letter to Corporate Life

I've been a little rough on corporate in this book. Some of that is deliberate, because a bit of truth delivered with a shove can wake people up. But I don't want the message to land as if corporate life was some bleak prison sentence I survived.

It wasn't.

Corporate life was great. Properly great. It gave me momentum and confidence. It gave me standards. It gave me a front-row seat to how big things get built. It taught me how decisions are made, how money moves, how teams work when they're at their best, and how to operate under pressure without falling apart. Those aren't small gifts. They're the foundation of how I still work now.

It also gave me most of my friends. A huge portion of my life came from those years. The jokes, the trips, the wins, the long days that turned into long nights, the people you'd go to war with on a deadline and then laugh with afterwards. You can say what you like about corporate culture, but when you find a good team, that's real. That's human. And it matters.

I didn’t leave because I hated it. I didn’t leave in protest. I didn’t leave to “find myself” in some dramatic reinvention arc, even though I did flirt with that idea like everyone does when they suddenly have time to think. I left because something shifted, slowly at first, and then so obviously that you couldn’t pretend it wasn’t happening.

I honestly thought I’d be in that world for a long time. I thought I’d keep climbing. Keep learning. Keep building. I could see a future there, and I wasn’t resentful about it. There was a kind of optimism baked into that era. You could work hard, do well, and get rewarded. Not perfectly, not always, but enough that the deal felt stable.

Then the world changed.

COVID didn’t just disrupt work. It disrupted predictability. It showed how quickly “normal” can vanish. It showed how fast businesses can move from confident to terrified, and how easily the rules can be rewritten overnight. It changed the emotional relationship people had with security.

Working from home didn’t just change where we sit. It changed what companies can justify paying for. It changed how talent is sourced, measured, and replaced. It changed what “presence” means. It made the labour market feel wider, faster, and less personal. The office stopped being a place and became an idea, and once that happened, a lot of old assumptions quietly broke.

Then AI arrived, and it didn’t kick the door down like a movie villain. It just started removing the administrative padding that made so much professional work feel “busy.” The formatting, the summarising, the rewriting, the coordination, the endless documentation that sits around actual decisions like packaging around a product. Whole roles were built on that layer. AI doesn’t need it.

And then cost of living did what cost of living does. It took a lot of the romance out of stability. It’s hard to feel loyal to a system when groceries feel like a subscription and rent feels like a punishment. People stopped fantasising about career ladders and started doing the maths. That changes everything.

So yes, corporate feels different now. It feels like we're holding onto a shifting landscape. It feels like we're trying to stand still while the ground moves under us. And it's not because people suddenly got weaker. It's because the deal is changing.

I don't say that to be doom and gloom. I'm not trying to scare you. I'm not trying to convince you that corporate is dead or that anyone still in it is deluded. That's lazy.

I'm saying something much simpler: I loved that life. It was good. It was real. It shaped me. I'm grateful for it. If you're in it now and you're thriving, I understand why. I don't want to take that away from you. I don't want to turn this into a book that makes you feel like you wasted your time just because you wore a badge and had a manager.

That chapter of work had optimism in it, and I miss that optimism. Not in a nostalgic way where everything "used to be better," but in a practical way. The optimism that came from believing that doing good work would be met with stability and progress, not constant anxiety and quiet threat.

And I also believe corporate can prosper again. I just don't think it will prosper in the same way. The old model of professionalism is being rewritten. The next version might be more fluid. More project-based. More outcome-driven. More like teams assembling to build something real, then dispersing, then assembling again. Still professional. Still ambitious. Still meaningful. Just less contained by one employer and one title.

A different mode of operating.

One where the best parts of corporate life don't die, they leave the building. They move outside. They become portable. You carry the standards, the discipline, the craft, the professionalism, the relationships, the pride in good work, and you take it into the wild. You build with it again, just in a different shape.

That's what I'm trying to honour here. Not the corporate machine, but the people inside it. The good years. The good work. The good friendships. The reality of it.

It was a great life.

It just isn't the only one anymore.

Financial Upside and Lifestyle Design

" *Money is a tool for crafting a life on your own terms, not just accumulating wealth*."

Tim Ferriss

Tim Ferriss is a hero of mine.

And yes, The 4-Hour Workweek changed my life back in the day. It didn't just sell a fantasy, it gave people permission to question the default settings of work. It made a whole generation look up from their spreadsheets and ask, "Wait… why are we doing it like this?"

But here's my unpopular, slightly annoying take:

Lifestyle design is not the objective.

It's not the Bali villa. It's not the laptop on the Amalfi Coast with a cappuccino staged next to it like you're filming a "day in the life" reel. It's not working from an infinity pool while your calendar mysteriously stays empty. That's not a plan. That's content.

Now, if you can work that in, fucking go for it. Truly. I have zero moral objection to ocean views and irresponsible amounts of sunlight. In fact, I can recommend some amazing restaurants and accommodation in Italy if you like.

I just want to make sure you understand what lifestyle design actually is, because most people hear the phrase and immediately picture escape. Escape from responsibility, escape from effort, escape from reality.

Real lifestyle design isn't about escaping work. It's about doing the work you’re meant to do.

In your body. In your strengths. In your nature.

I wasn’t intended for meetings. I wasn’t intended to sit in a room pretending I’m listening while secretly writing a grocery list and wondering how long I can fake eye contact before someone notices. I wasn’t built to attend “alignment sessions” about “stakeholder expectations” that produce absolutely nothing except a follow-up meeting.

I was intended to create hype and sales.

To spot the signal, craft the story, create momentum, close deals, build something that moves. That’s not me being special. That’s me being honest about where I actually create value.

That’s what lifestyle design is: aligning your work with your nature.

The freedom isn’t “no work.” The freedom is the right work.

And once you start living that way, something else becomes obvious: the real upgrade isn’t the view from the laptop.

It’s not being beholden to payroll.

Because payroll is a beautiful thing right up until it isn’t. It’s comforting right up until it becomes a cage. It’s stable right up until your company decides to “restructure in response to market conditions” and suddenly your stability is a PDF attachment.

Fractional work shifts that.

You pay you.

It sounds simple, but it’s a profound psychological change. You stop waiting for permission to be valuable. You stop outsourcing your security to one employer. You start building something that can support you because it generates cashflow, not because a manager approves your existence every fortnight.

And yes, the financial upside can take time. Sometimes it's immediate, but most of the time it compounds. It compounds because you learn to structure work differently. You stop selling hours and start selling outcomes. You build repeatable offers. You stack engagements. You add upside.

That's where the real upside comes from: structure.

You can build deals with retainers that give you baseline cashflow. You can build performance components—commissions, bonuses, milestone payouts—so when you create value, you share in it. You can negotiate annual reviews like you're a business, not an employee. You can even negotiate equity if you've got the stomach for it and the client has the maturity to do it properly.

Equity is not a fantasy, by the way. It's just a different form of upside. It can also be worthless. So if you're going to play that game, do it with eyes open and with advice. But the point is, in fractional work, you're allowed to structure upside. You're not capped by a salary band and a polite 3% increase that arrives with a "congratulations" email.

You can actually participate in the value you create.

Now, before you get too excited and start building elaborate deal structures like you're negotiating a Hollywood contract, we need to talk about the least sexy part of this chapter.

You need an accountant.

Not later. Not "once it's going well." Now.

Get an accountant and listen to them.

I’m saying it twice because this is the part that separates adults from chaos merchants.

There is no paycheck-to-paycheck now. There is only cashflow and reserves. There is only knowing what’s coming in, what’s going out, what you owe, what you can safely spend, and what you need to hold.

That’s not scary. That’s business.

And once you’re in business, you start thinking differently about money. You stop thinking in “salary.” You start thinking in:

Runway.

Buffer.

Tax.

Quarterly obligations.

Operating costs.

Profit.

Reinvestment.

You also stop confusing revenue with income, which is the fastest way to accidentally bankrupt yourself while feeling successful.

An accountant will save you from yourself. They’ll also help you set up the basics properly: structure, tax, compliance, and the boring stuff that keeps your life from turning into a stress dream.

Get an app too, sure. Use whatever makes cashflow visible. Track invoices.

Track expenses. Track what's owed. But don't be the person who thinks an app replaces an accountant. That's like thinking a Fitbit replaces a doctor.

And here's the part most people miss: when you're fractional, your work creates an asset.

In employment, your job doesn't belong to you. The moment you leave, it's gone. Your salary doesn't become a saleable thing. Your role isn't an asset. It's a rental agreement between you and the company.

In business, you can build value beyond your labour.

You can build repeatable offers. You can build a client base. You can build referrals and case studies. You can build systems. You can build a brand. You can build relationships that continue paying you because the market remembers what you do.

That's why you're not beholden to payroll anymore.

Because payroll used to be the only place value got converted into money for you.

Now you have multiple conversion points.

You can sell outcomes. You can sell access. You can sell expertise. You can sell systems. You can sell performance. You can even sell the business one day, or parts of it, because it has value beyond you being "employed."

That's the real financial upside.

Not the fantasy of never working.

The reality of owning the machine that pays you.

So yes, Tim Ferriss is a legend. And yes, lifestyle design is real.

But it’s not about running away to a villa.

It’s about designing a work life where you do what you’re intended to do, where your value compounds, and where your security comes from something you control.

You don’t wait for payroll.

You become payroll.

Managing Your Finances: How To Get Rich

GET AN ACCOUNTANT!

Now move along.

How To Always Look Sexy

Gotcha! No, this is about the boring stuff that saves your ass later

Let's talk about the part of fractional work that no one posts about on LinkedIn.

Not the "freedom" bit.

Not the beach laptop fantasy (which is mostly glare and sand in your keyboard anyway).

The boring setup.

Because when you're employed, the system quietly handles a bunch of things for you.
Tax gets withheld.
Super/pension gets paid (usually).
Payroll happens.
Expenses are someone else's problem.
Your bank account doesn't need to know the difference between "revenue" and "rent money."

When you go fractional, that whole invisible support layer disappears.
And if you don't rebuild it deliberately, you'll end up doing what most new independents do:

You'll run a business… through your personal account… and then act surprised when tax time feels like being audited by your own past decisions.

This section is here to stop that.

Not with a finance lecture.
With a simple setup that makes you look like an adult who plans to stay in business.

Start with separation: the "two buckets" rule

Your first goal isn't sophistication.
It's separation.

At minimum, you want:

- a business bank account
- a system for putting aside tax (and anything like GST/VAT/sales tax that applies where you live)

Even if you do nothing else, don't mix business income with personal spending like it's a shared Spotify subscription.

It makes bookkeeping harder, tax messier, and cashflow impossible to read.
And worst of all, it creates the illusion that you're earning more than you are… right up until the government sends you a bill that ruins your month.

Your basic account setup

You can keep this painfully simple.

Account 1: Business Income (Operating Account)
This is where clients pay you.
All income lands here.
Business expenses come out of here.

Account 2: Tax Buffer (Do Not Touch Account)
Every time money comes in, a percentage immediately moves here.
Not "later when you remember."
Immediately.

This is the difference between a calm adult and someone bargaining with the universe in June.

Optional but helpful:
Account 3: Profit / Pay Yourself
This is where you transfer your “salary” to your personal account.
Because you still need a life that doesn’t depend on a client paying early.

Optional but *very* helpful if you’re prone to optimism:
Account 4: Expenses Buffer
A small buffer for software renewals, insurance, annual bills, unexpected tools, and “oh right, I need a laptop” moments.

If you’re thinking “this feels excessive,” good.
That’s the employed-brain talking.
Employed-brain is used to somebody else managing the machine.

Fractional-brain learns to build the machine.

Tax isn’t a vibe. It’s a system.

I’m not going to pretend I can tell you how tax works in your exact jurisdiction, because:

1. it changes
2. it varies
3. you don’t want your business built on advice you got from a bloke who once thought a black turtleneck made him Steve Jobs

But here’s the universal truth:

When you’re employed, tax is hidden.
When you’re independent, tax is *loud*.

So your job is to make it boring again.

That means:

- understanding what you need to set aside
- knowing whether you need to register for things like GST/VAT/sales tax
- knowing what you can claim and what you absolutely should not try to “creatively interpret”
- paying on time so you don’t get penalised for being “busy”

And this is where I’m going to be annoyingly consistent:

Get an accountant. Get an advisor. Early.

Not when you “make enough.”
Not after you’ve already created a mess.
Now.

Because a good accountant doesn’t just “do your tax.”
They help you decide the shape of the business.

They’ll guide you through:

- sole trader vs company vs other structures (whatever applies where you live)
- what registrations you need
- what you can expense and how to track it
- how to pay yourself properly
- what to do about retirement contributions/super/pension
- basic compliance so you can sleep

Think of it like hiring a coach when you start training properly.
You can wing it… but you’ll waste time, pick up bad habits, and eventually injure yourself.

Your accountant is injury prevention for your finances.

And if you're reading this thinking, "I'll do it later," just know later usually looks like:

- scrambling the night before a lodgement deadline
- googling "can I claim my home office chair"
- realising you owe more than expected
- and swearing you'll never do this again

Which is a hilarious thing to say when you're literally building a business.

Business tools you'll want before you think you need them

Again: keep it simple.

Invoicing
Have a clean invoice template.
Use invoicing software if you want, but the key is consistency:

- invoice number
- your business details
- client details
- payment terms
- bank details
- what the work was
- tax details if relevant

Expense tracking
Save receipts.
Track subscriptions.
Record what you spend and why.
The goal isn't to become an accountant.

The goal is to stop losing money through disorganisation.

Insurance
Depending on your field, you may need some form of professional indemnity / liability cover.
This is one of those “you don’t care until you really, really care” things.
Ask your advisor. Don’t guess.

Contracts
Have a basic agreement.
Even if it’s simple.
Especially if it’s simple.
The contract is there for the moment things get weird, not the moment things are going well.

What most people don’t consider when leaving employment

Here are the sneaky ones:

Cashflow timing
You can be profitable and still broke.
Invoices don’t feed you until they’re paid.

Your “benefits” were real
Leave, sick days, insurance, super/pension contributions.
When you go fractional, you become the employer too.

Pricing isn’t just income
Your rate needs to cover:

- tax
- admin time
- software
- non-billable work
- learning
- time between clients

- retirement contributions
- the fact you’re not paid for “being available”

If you price like an employee, you’ll live like a stressed freelancer.
We’re not doing that.

The point of this section

This setup isn’t about being corporate.
It’s about being durable.

Fractional work gives you freedom, yes.
But freedom without structure turns into anxiety with better branding.

So build the boring foundations:

- separate your money
- set aside tax
- get proper advice
- make admin repeatable
- keep the business readable

Then your brain can focus on the work you’re actually here to do:
creating value, delivering outcomes, and building leverage.

And you’ll be amazed how confident you feel when your business doesn’t rely on hope and last-minute panic.

Tech-Savvy at Sixty: Launching Late, Winning Big

"One has to remember that every failure can be a stepping stone to something better."

Colonel Harland Sanders

There's a particular kind of panic that hits good people in their fifties and sixties when the conversation turns to modern work.

It's not "I can't do this." It's more like, "I can do this… but it feels like the rules changed while I was busy being competent."

New platforms. New tools. New acronyms. New "best practices" that change every six minutes. Suddenly you're being told you need a personal brand, a content strategy, a funnel, an AI assistant, and a ring light. And if you don't have all of that, you're apparently going to be left behind like a fax machine.

I'm here to tell you something that might annoy the tech evangelists, but will calm your nervous system: technology hasn't made it harder for you.

It's made the basics valuable again.

I noticed this properly after spending time around two very different groups I've mentioned earlier: the creative agency crew, and the young woman who built a top-tier talent agency through sheer drive and refusal to wait for permission.

These people are sharp. Ambitious. Relentless. They've built real businesses. But here's what surprised me: they didn't know anything about the corporate systems and admin rituals that many of us became weirdly proud of.

They weren't fluent in internal approvals. They didn't speak "stakeholder alignment." They didn't care about the sacred process of updating the CRM in triplicate to satisfy some dashboard that nobody reads anyway. Half the time, they weren't even using the tools "properly," which made my inner corporate lizard brain itch.

They had YouTube and parents.

That's not a joke. That's the system.

They learned what they needed, when they needed it. They asked someone who'd done it before. They watched a ten-minute video. They got moving. They built the plane while flying it, which, if you've been in corporate long enough, is illegal in at least twelve policies.

And they still won.

That's when it clicked for me: a lot of what we think of as "being professional" in corporate is really just being trained to operate inside a machine. It's not useless, but it's not the whole game anymore.

Because now, when everyone has the same tools, the same templates, the same AI writing their emails, the same puffer vest and chinos uniform… standing out doesn't come from having more software.

Standing out comes from being human.

It comes from trust.

It comes from clarity.

It comes from doing what you said you'd do.

The old-school stuff that you might think is outdated—handshakes, direct conversations, follow-through, your word meaning something—carries more weight now, not less. People are tired of slick. They're tired of polish with no substance. They're tired of "let's circle back" as a substitute for action.

There's a quiet hunger in the market right now for people who are steady.

People who can look someone in the eye and say, "Here's what I can do, here's what it will cost, here's when it will be done," and then actually deliver it without turning it into a performance.

That's not nostalgia. That's differentiation.

And this is where "tech-savvy at sixty" becomes a different story than you've been sold.

Being tech-savvy doesn't mean you're the fastest at new apps. It doesn't mean you can prompt engineer your way into enlightenment. It means you're willing to learn what matters, ignore what doesn't, and use technology as a tool—not as a test of your worth.

You don't need to win the internet.

You need to win trust.

You need to make outcomes happen.

You need to be valuable in a way that survives platform changes.

If anything, launching later can be an advantage because you're not confused about what matters. You've lived through enough hype cycles to know the difference between signal and noise. You're less likely to build your identity around a tool. You're more likely to build it around results.

And the best part? The “new world” of work is actually more welcoming to that than people realise.

Project-based work. Outcome-based deals. Fractional engagements. Contractor teams assembling to get things done. This is closer to how real business has always worked than the corporate era wants to admit. It’s not a kids’ game. It’s a grown-ups’ game with fewer meetings.

So if you’re reading this thinking, “I’m behind,” I want you to consider another possibility.

You’re not behind.

You’re just not obsessed with the wrong things.

Learn the tools you need. Use YouTube like everyone else. Ask your kids. Ask your friends. Ask someone twenty years younger and let them feel useful for once.

But don’t confuse “not fluent in the latest software” with “not relevant.”

Relevance comes from outcomes. From trust. From showing up. From being the kind of person people want on their side when something matters.

Handshakes still matter. So does your word. Deals still get done in conversations that don’t involve a Slack channel.

And if you can bring that energy—steady, human, professional—into this new world, you won’t just keep up.

You’ll stand out like a lighthouse in a sea of puffer vests.

From Software to Coffee to Body Wash

"I don't know where I'm going, but I know exactly how to get there"

Lion Tracker

Here is my brief journey to fractional life…

If you drew a straight line through my career, you'd assume either I can't commit to anything, or I've been quietly speedrunning an identity crisis for two decades.

Skateboarding punk kid. Band guy. Ice hockey. Makeup artist. Software executive. Coffee business. And now, somehow, I'm a purveyor of MANWASH, Australia's most loved-by-women men's 3-in-1 wash.

On paper it looks like five different lives. In reality, it's been one life. The same instincts. The same operating system. The same cheeky little Cords, just wearing different uniforms.

That's the part I want to make clear upfront, because this chapter isn't here to impress you with variety. It's here to show you something important about how people actually build a satisfying life. It's rarely built by mastering one "how." It's built by getting honest about the "who" and then arranging the world around that.

I've always been the same person. I just kept finding new places where that person could create value.

When I was a skateboarding kid, I didn't know the word "brand," but I understood identity. Skateboarding isn't just a sport. It's culture. It's taste.

It’s tribe. It’s showing up in public and getting humbled until you either quit or you build a certain kind of resilience. You learn that nobody cares about your intentions. They care about what you can do. You land the trick or you don’t. You show up again or you disappear.

That lesson never left me. It just changed outfits.

Then there was music. I was in a band, and yes, we were genuinely good. I’m not saying we were going to headline stadiums, but we were the kind of good where you could feel a room change when the first chorus hit. It taught me that energy matters. It taught me that story matters. It taught me that the way you make people feel is often more powerful than the technical details of what you’re doing.

That’s marketing, by the way. I just didn’t call it that yet.

Ice hockey came next, and it did what hockey does. It introduced me to discomfort without any of the motivational language. Hockey is a teacher that doesn’t care about your feelings. It taught me endurance. It taught me humility. It taught me the difference between confidence and self-deception. It taught me to take hits, recover, and keep moving, which turns out to be a useful skill when life and business start throwing checks and challenges at you.

It also taught me something subtler. Toughness isn’t the point. Adaptability is. The people who win aren’t always the loudest or the hardest. They’re the ones who adjust faster and keep learning.

Somewhere in that timeline, I became a makeup artist. That sentence still makes people blink, and I understand why. But it might be one of the most useful chapters of my life because it sharpened my awareness of humans. When you’re working on someone’s face, you’re not just dealing with technique. You’re dealing with identity, confidence, insecurity, mood, trust. You learn how to listen. You learn how to translate what someone thinks they want into what actually works. You learn how to create calm, and how to make someone feel ready.

That’s not just makeup. That’s people. And people are always the job, no matter what industry you’re in.

Then I fell into the corporate software world, which was meant to be a chapter and turned into an era. I did well. I learned the machine. I learned how big businesses buy. I learned how decisions really get made, and how often the real objection isn’t the product, it’s fear. I learned how to build credibility in rooms where credibility is currency. I learned how to navigate pressure and politics without losing my mind.

And I want to be clear about something: I didn’t hate corporate life. I loved parts of it. I loved great teams. I loved the intensity of a deal moving. I loved the craft of being useful and watching it pay off.

But even at my best, there was a feeling I couldn’t ignore. I wasn’t unhappy. I just wasn’t fully me. I was performing “professional” a lot of the time. I was wearing a version of myself that fit the environment, but wasn’t the whole truth.

That’s where my whole “help them buy” philosophy came from. Traditional selling never really worked for me as a long-term strategy. Helping people buy did. Listening, diagnosing, guiding, being useful, being human, creating clarity. That approach worked everywhere. It was the same me again, just expressed through a different medium.

Later, I stumbled into coffee through friendship and curiosity. That chapter felt like oxygen. It wasn’t nine-to-five. It was messy and real and creative. It reminded me of music. You build something, you test it, you adjust, you laugh, you panic, you do it anyway. Consumer business is honest like that. You can’t hide behind slides. The product either works or it doesn’t. The brand either lands or it doesn’t. People either come back or they don’t.

And then came MANWASH, which still sounds like a punchline if you say it in the wrong tone. If you told teenage me that one day I’d be selling men’s 3-in-1 wash loved by women, I would’ve laughed in your face and then attempted a trick I had no business attempting, just to prove I was still cool.

But MANWASH makes perfect sense when you understand the thread. It's a practical product with a point of view. It's about making life easier, making people feel better, and doing it with enough taste that it belongs in the real world. It's also built around how buying actually works. Women buy a lot of household and personal-care products, and they care about what lives in the shower. That's not a gimmick. That's observing reality and building around it.

Same instincts. Same "help them buy" approach. Different packaging.

Even the sporting detours fit the pattern. I've always been drawn to things that require repetition, discomfort, and gradual improvement. I like the feeling of getting better. I like the lesson of being a beginner again. It keeps you humble. It keeps you honest. It reminds you that identity isn't tied to being good at something. It's tied to being willing to learn.

So yes, the story looks like a mess when you list it out. It looks like a collection of unrelated roles and random phases.

But it hasn't been random.

It's been the same person, in different contexts, doing the same core things: creating energy, building trust, learning fast, making things happen, and helping people move from stuck to forward.

That's the point I want you to take from my story, because it's bigger than me.

You don't need one clean career ladder to be credible. You need a coherent value story. You need to know who you are when you're at your best, and then you need to stop forcing yourself into work that requires you to pretend to be someone else.

I didn’t build a life around “how.” Titles change. Industries change. Tools change. Entire markets shift under your feet.

I built a life around “who.”

Around the version of me that shows up when things are alive. When the work is real. When there’s something to build, something to sell, something to create, something to move.

That’s why I can go from software to coffee to body wash and still feel like the same person. It’s not reinvention. It’s alignment.

Same Adam.

Cheeky little Cords.

Just with better soap, less time for meetings, and a lot more ownership over the life I’m building.

Now I own and run companies. Proper ones. From consumer brands to biotech, the kind of thing that makes people raise an eyebrow and ask, “Wait… how are those even related?” as if my life is meant to fit neatly into a dropdown menu.

They’re related because I’m related.

That’s the whole point.

At some stage I stopped trying to explain myself in a way that made other people comfortable. I stopped rehearsing the tidy version of my story so it sounded “logical” to someone who only respects a straight line. I stopped treating my career like it needed a defense lawyer.

I’m not here to be understood by everyone. I’m here to build.

So now, when someone asks what I do, I don't panic and start listing titles like I'm reading my own resume out loud. I just tell the truth. I build things. I help things grow. I make things happen. Sometimes that looks like consumer products. Sometimes it looks like diagnostics and science. Sometimes it looks like advising a business that needs momentum yesterday.

And I don't do it because I'm chasing variety for the sake of it. I do it because I'm wired for value creation. I like the puzzle. I like the story. I like the craft. I like the moment something clicks and the whole thing moves forward.

The funny part is, once you stop explaining yourself, people stop demanding an explanation. They can sense when someone is trying to justify their existence versus someone who's just operating. Confidence, real confidence, is quiet. It's not "look at me." It's "watch what I do."

That's how I live now. I plod along. I take the next step. I ship the next thing. I learn what I need to learn. I ask for help when I need it. I stay close to people who build. I stay away from people who critique from the stands.

And yes, I'm having a blast.

Not every day. Some days are chaos. Some days are stress. Some days are you staring at a problem thinking, "How is this my life?" But even then, it's my chaos. It's my stress. It's my problem to solve. I'm not trapped inside someone else's structure trying to squeeze my instincts into their process.

I get paid because I create value, not because I occupy a chair.

That's the upgrade.

Payroll used to be the finish line. Now payroll is something I generate. I don't wait to be rewarded for effort. I build outcomes that earn money.

That's a very different relationship with work. It's more honest. More direct. Less performative. Less pretending.

And the strangest part is how normal it becomes once you're in it. You stop thinking, "Is this allowed?" You stop thinking, "Will people get it?" You stop thinking, "What should I call myself?"

You just do the work.

You plod along.

You build.

You create value.

You get paid.

And if someone doesn't understand the path you took to get there, that's fine. They can stay inside the neat little career ladder and judge from above.

I'll be down here in the wild, doing the thing I'm actually built to do.

Your Work, Your Way

We've covered a lot together.

We've talked about the emerging generation who barely even considers corporate jobs the default path anymore. Not because they're rebellious for sport, but because they watched the old promise wobble. They saw good people do everything right and still get laid off when the numbers didn't like the weather. They saw loyalty answered with "restructure." So instead of spending a decade climbing and hoping the ladder stays leaned against the right wall, they started building their own thing.

Not perfectly. Not politely. But consistently.

And here's the part that matters: it's working.

We've also looked at something that might surprise you. In this new environment, the old-school ways can actually play really well. Handshakes. Clear conversations. Doing what you said you'd do. Being direct without being a jerk. Having standards. Being the person who follows through.

Look around and everyone sounds the same, dresses the same, and sends the same "just circling back" email that an AI probably wrote, being a real human is not a soft skill. It's a competitive advantage. Trust is becoming more valuable, not less. Reliability stands out now.

We've pulled apart the market dynamics too, because it's hard to feel calm when you can't name what's happening.

AI is stripping out a huge amount of the admin work that padded corporate days. Not the deep judgment work. Not the trust work. Not the work that needs context, taste, and a bit of spine. The filler. The reporting. The coordination. The "busy work" that made people feel employed even when value was thin. As that disappears, value becomes more visible. And when value is visible, companies start paying for it differently.

Working from home didn't just change where you sit. It changed how businesses buy labour. If work can be done from anywhere, companies can hire from anywhere. They can outsource more easily. They can contract more easily. They can build project teams and dissolve them. It's not personal. It's economics. Businesses optimise.

Cost of living has been the accelerant. When life gets expensive, people stop romanticising stability and start doing the math. Salaries that once felt safe now feel tight. Meanwhile businesses are doing their own math too. Payroll is heavy. Flexibility is light. Outcomes are measurable. So more and more work gets structured around projects, contractors, and specialist capability bought "as needed."

Whether you call it fractional, contracting, consulting, or just "doing work like an adult," the direction is the same. Work is being purchased more like a service and less like a lifetime membership.

Now, after hearing all that, it would be completely normal to feel a little tense. Your brain might be doing that thing where it tries to turn "change" into "danger."

So I want to make this part really clear as we land the plane.

The thing that gives you confidence isn't the market.

It's you.

You're not starting from nothing. You're not stepping into the wild with no tools. You have experience. You have judgment. You've been in rooms where decisions were made. You've delivered outcomes under pressure. You've navigated ambiguity, shifting priorities, and the kind of workplace politics that can make a sane person briefly consider becoming a barista.

That matters.

And there’s something else you have that’s even more important, especially now: your taste, your individuality, your way about you.

The way you see problems. The way you simplify. The way you build trust. The way you read a room. The way you move things forward without needing a committee and three weeks of meetings to approve your existence.

That’s not fluff. That’s your asset.

Artists and creators understand this instinctively. Their work isn’t just technique. It’s them. Their point of view. Their instincts. The little edge that can’t be copied. That’s why you can have ten people using the same tools and one person still stands out. Their taste shows up in the work.

It’s the same for you. Even if you’ve spent years inside corporate identity, you still have a personal one. It might be a bit dusty. It might have been squeezed under job titles and org charts. But it’s there. And it’s been waiting for you to use it properly.

Corporations often give you an identity. A badge. A title. A logo you can borrow confidence from. They tell you where you fit. They tell you what lane you’re in. And for a while, that structure is useful. It gives you training wheels. It gives you reps. It gives you standards.

But borrowed identity has an expiry date.

At some point the logo stops being enough. The title stops being enough. The ladder starts to feel less like progress and more like habit. And you start asking the question underneath everything we’ve talked about:

Who am I when I’m not being held up by a company?

That question isn't a threat. It's a doorway.

Because the moment you answer it, you stop chasing "more" in the way the world sells it. Not more status, more titles, more money as a scoreboard. You start chasing more of what you're actually good at. More of the work that makes you feel alive. More of the value you're uniquely suited to create. More ownership.

And you don't have to do this in one dramatic leap. You don't need a perfect plan. You don't need to move at internet speed.

You build it with reps.

With conversations.

With a first offer tested in the real world.

With boundaries held.

With a few wins you can point to.

With a cabinet of people you trust.

With finances set up properly so you can breathe.

If you do nothing else after reading this book, do this:

stop waiting for permission to be the version of you that creates value. Book the conversations. Test the offer. Ask for the referral. Build the cabinet. Keep your standards high. Stay human. Keep moving.

The market is shifting whether you move or not. The only real question is whether you meet that shift prepared, or whether it meets you first.

Corporate can remain a chapter you respect. It can even remain a chapter you stay in for a while longer. But it doesn't have to be the whole book.

You get to define your identity now. You get to build a life around who you are, not just how you've been told to work.

And you will find a way, not because you're chasing some billionaire fantasy, but because your taste, your judgment, your individuality, and your humanity are exactly what this next era needs.

Be the change you want to see in the world, and yes… I stole that.

100 FAQs answered drinking limoncello

Mindset and the “am I insane?” phase

1) What is fractional work?

It’s senior work without being staff. You sell outcomes. You keep your soul. You also stop pretending you love “alignment.”

2) Is fractional just freelancing with nicer nouns?

If you do it badly, yes. If you do it properly, it’s a small business that sells results and sleeps at night.

3) Do I need to quit first to be taken seriously?

No. Quitting first is how you turn bravery into a minor financial thriller.

4) I’m scared. Is that a sign I shouldn’t do it?

No. Fear is just your brain doing admin. Listen to it, then plan anyway.

5) What’s the biggest shift?

Stop acting like a candidate. Start acting like a supplier. You’re not “hoping.” You’re solving.

6) What if I like corporate?

Then stay. Enjoy the stable pay and the occasional free muffin. Just build optionality so you’re not held hostage by PowerPoint.

7) Is this “not for everyone”?

Wrong. The market is changing. Learn it, even if you never jump. Think of it as career insurance.

8) Am I too old for this?

No. You’re too old to be pretending you’re powerless.

9) Am I too young for this?

Also no. Outcomes don’t check your birth certificate.

10) Do I need confidence?

No. You need one win and a receipt. Confidence is just evidence with better posture.

Offers and packaging:

11) What should I sell first?

The quickest outcome you can deliver without needing seventeen approvals and a miracle.

12) What’s an outcome offer in one line?

“I help [buyer] get [result] in [timeframe].” Done. No poems.

13) What deliverables should I include?

Only the ones that create the outcome. Not the ones that make you sound like a corporate wizard.

14) Can I sell "advice"?

Yes, but package it. "Decision support" with cadence and boundaries. Otherwise you become the human suggestion box.

15) What's a good first productized offer?

A 30–90 day sprint with a clear target, weekly cadence, and something they can hold in their hands at the end.

16) How do I pick a niche?

Pick the problem you solve repeatedly. Your niche is your pattern, not your LinkedIn identity crisis.

17) What if I want to do lots of things?

Fine. Start with one offer. Get proof. Then you can be chaotic strategically.

18) How do I avoid being "a generalist"?

Be a specialist in an outcome. Nobody buys "general." They buy "fix this."

19) Should I do workshops?

Yes, if they lead to implementation. Otherwise you're just hosting corporate campfires, but with Mentos not marshmallows.

20) Do I need a website?

Not early. You need conversations and proof. A one-pager later. Nobody hired a website. Unless you build websites... pretty self explanatory.

Pricing:

21) How do I price without hourly rates?

Price the outcome container. Value + risk + timeframe + scope. Hours are your internal math, not your product.

22) What if they demand hourly?

Reframe. If they still insist, charge premium hourly or politely leave them to hire a timesheet.

23) How do I answer "how many hours?"

"Enough to hit the outcome by the deadline. Typical range is X–Y focused hours/week." Calm. Unbothered.

24) What's a "good" day rate?

The one that makes you swallow once before you say it. That's how you know it's not an employee number.

25) Should I underprice to get started?

Trade, don't discount. If they want cheaper, you want proof.

26) How do I raise prices later?

New offer, new price, backed by proof. You don't "raise," you evolve.

27) Is it normal to charge more than my salary equivalent?

Yes. You're covering risk, tax, downtime, overhead, and you're delivering outcomes. Salary maths is not the maths anymore.

28) How do I avoid scope creep eating profit?

Boundaries + trade-offs. Add this, remove that, extend time, or increase fee. Those are the laws of physics.

29) What if I'm pricing and I feel guilty?

That's your employee brain. Tell it to sit down and drink water.

30) Should I put prices on my website?

Not necessary. You're not selling socks. Price depends on outcomes and scope.

Negotiation (the fun part):

31) What's the #1 negotiation difference from employment?

Employment negotiates role and time. Fractional negotiates outcomes, access, structure, and risk. Much more civilised.

32) What payment terms should I insist on?

Monthly upfront or Net 7/14. Net 60 is them asking you to finance their chaos.

33) They want Net 60. What do I say?

"Net 7 at standard rate. Net 60 at a higher fee." Say it like you've done this before. Because you have now.

34) What is a retainer, really?

A reservation fee for your brain. With rules.

35) What’s an access retainer?

They pay for defined capacity and responsiveness. Not ownership of your soul.

36) What’s an outcome retainer?

They pay for rolling delivery toward defined goals. Like a subscription to progress.

37) How do I structure commission?

Base + upside. Always. Commission-only is a casino.

38) What’s a good “bonus” structure?

Milestone payouts tied to measurable outcomes. “When we hit X, I get Y.” Simple.

39) Can I negotiate equity?

Yes, but treat it like dating a musician. High upside, high chaos. Get advice.

40) How do I say no?

“I can do that, but it changes scope/timeline/fee. Which do you want to adjust?” Smile. Be polite. Be immovable.

Pipeline and clients:

41) Where do I find clients?

Signals. Job boards, business news, layoffs, hiring sprees, founders, communities, referrals. The market is yelling—just listen.

42) Are job boards useful for fractional work?

Yes. They're pain signals wearing a job title moustache.

43) Is LinkedIn my client list?

No. LinkedIn is your conversation engine and credibility layer. Clients come from trust bridges, not hot takes.

44) What's pipeline?

A living chain of conversations that compound. Not a funnel. Not a spreadsheet. A social organism.

45) How many conversations should I have active?

5–10 while building. Panic reduces as conversations increase. It's math.

46) How do I do outreach without sounding gross?

Be short, specific, and human. Outcome + signal + invite.

47) What do I say in the first call?

Diagnose pain, define outcome, confirm timeline, agree next step. Pitch later. This isn't speed dating.

48) How do I get my first client?

Warm network, outcome conversations, and a proof trade if needed.

49) How do referrals happen?

When people know exactly what you do. Vagueness is referral kryptonite.

50) What if I hate selling?

Then stop “selling.” Diagnose and help people buy. It’s the same thing with less cringe.

Networking and the contractor cabinet:

51) What is the contractor cabinet?

Your crew of trusted specialists who make you more deliverable and less stressed.

52) Why is it important?

It expands capability, stabilises pipeline, and prevents loneliness from making you do dumb deals.

53) Who belongs in it?

People who fill your gaps: ops, design, legal, finance, marketing, sales, delivery specialists. Complementary skills. Shared standards.

54) How do I build it?

Coffee chats with intent. “I’m building a cabinet of trusted operators—want to swap notes and refer work?”

55) What’s co-priming?

Bringing partners in early so the client sees a team solution. It feels safer and more premium.

56) How do we pitch as a team?

"I'll lead and own outcomes. I'll bring in X for Y." Clean. No theatre.

57) What if someone steals my client?

Choose trustworthy people, set expectations, and remember: thieves always look busy.

58) Should I formalise an agency?

Not at first. Cabinets become agencies naturally when the same crew wins repeatedly.

59) How do I handle referral fees?

Either no fee (trust economy) or a clear % for paid intros. No weirdness.

60) What's the tradie model in white collar?

Specialists referring each other, co-delivering, then celebrating with a 2pm parmy (Chicken Parmigiana) like champions.

Proof, case studies, testimonials:

61) How do I get proof early?

Trade margin for it. Lower fee in exchange for case study, testimonial, or introductions.

62) How do I ask for a testimonial?

"I'll draft a few options—pick the one that feels true." People love easy.

63) How do I ask for a case study?

“Ten-minute chat. I write it. You approve it. Nobody suffers.”

64) How do I structure case studies?

Before → Goal → What we did → After → Quote. Not a Netflix docuseries.

65) Can I anonymise case studies?

Yes. “Mid-market SaaS” is a fine disguise. You’re not in court.

66) What if a client won’t be a reference?

Then you keep margin. Proof is part of the trade.

67) When should I ask for referrals?

After a win. Prime early. Ask cleanly. Don’t be weird.

68) How many case studies do I need?

Three strong ones. Then negotiations get easier and you stop sweating.

69) Can I use screenshots as proof?

Only if permitted and anonymised. Don’t get sued for vibes.

70) What if my best work is under NDA?

Describe outcomes without naming. Use ranges. Tell the truth without leaking secrets.

Finance and setup:

71) What’s my first finance step?

Get an accountant. Immediately. Not “once it’s going well.” Now!

72) Do I really need an accountant?

Yes. An app tracks. An accountant prevents dumb decisions. Big difference.

73) What should I track weekly?

Invoices, cash received, upcoming bills, tax set-aside, runway. If you can’t see it, you can’t steer it.

74) Should I have a separate bank account?

Yes. Mixing accounts is how you end up crying into receipts at midnight.

75) How much tax should I set aside?

Ask the accountant. Then do it. No negotiating with tax.

76) What’s the difference between revenue and profit?

Revenue is dopamine. Profit is oxygen. Don’t confuse the two.

77) Should I pay myself a salary?

Eventually. Early on, take a draw, build reserves, stabilise cashflow, then get fancy.

78) What are reserves?

Your “I’m not panicking” fund. Aim for 3–6 months when possible.

79) What apps should I use?

Whatever makes cashflow visible. But again: apps don’t give advice.

80) Do I need insurance?

Often yes. Professional work has risk. Adults mitigate risk.

Delivery and boundaries

81) How do I avoid being treated like staff?

Define outcomes, scope, cadence, and response times. Staff vibes invite staff treatment.

82) How many clients can I handle?

Start with 1–3. Don’t become a chaos goblin who delivers mediocre work to everyone.

83) What if clients demand instant replies?

Offer an urgent tier (higher fee) or enforce response SLAs. Otherwise everything becomes urgent, including nonsense.

84) How do I manage my calendar?

Batch calls. Protect deep work. Remember you’re not paid to attend meetings.

85) What if a client is abusive?

Fire them. Politely. Quickly. Your business is not a rehabilitation program.

86) What if I underdeliver once?

Own it, fix it, learn, tighten scope. Silence kills trust.

87) How do I handle scope creep emotionally?

With boredom and boundaries. It’s not personal. It’s just commerce.

88) Should I work weekends?

Sometimes. But don’t build “freedom” that looks like burnout with better fonts.

89) What if I get sick and can’t deliver?

Plan for being human. Cabinet support + reserves + realistic capacity.

90) How do I keep quality high while scaling?

Standardise offers, use partners, keep your lane tight, and stop saying yes to everything.

The crazy ones (as requested)

91) Can I be fractional for two competitors at once?

Sometimes, but be careful. Conflicts of interest are real. Transparency saves careers.

92) What if a client asks me to do something unethical?

Say no. Then sleep like a baby. Integrity is cheaper than lawsuits.

93) Can I negotiate a “chicken parmy clause”?

Yes. It’s called “relationship building.” Put it under “monthly check-in: in person.”

94) What if I want to run 5 companies like a manic wizard?

You can. But you’ll need systems, a cabinet, and a calendar that doesn’t want to fight you.

95) Can I put “fractional executive” on LinkedIn without cringe?

Yes. Cringe comes from vagueness, not titles. Back it with an outcome offer.

96) What if I have no clue what to call myself?

Don’t. Use outcomes. Titles are optional. Results aren’t.

97) What if my parents think this is a midlife crisis?

Tell them it is, but it has invoices and fewer leather jackets.

98) What if I miss corporate gossip?

Join a community. Or start a group chat called “Former Corporate Survivors Anonymous.”

99) What if my first month is a disaster?

Congrats, you’re officially a business. Fix, learn, iterate. Businesses aren’t born polished.

100) What’s the one thing to do this week if I do nothing else?

Book five conversations. Not pitches. Conversations. Momentum kills panic.