

STOP THINKING LIKE A FREELANCER: THE EVOLUTION OF A \$1M WEB DESIGNER

STOP

THINKING LIKE A FREELANCER



The Evolution of a \$1m Web Designer

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Stop thinking like a freelancer
The Evolution of a \$1m web designer

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About the author

Who cares, right? Well, if you insist.

A perennial business builder who 'finally got something to work'; Liam Veitch has many strings to his bow, along with an equal amount of failures to recount. A web designer by trade and now founder at UK based web agency [Tone](#) as well as freelancer community [Freelancelift](#), this book comprises everything he wished he knew *first time around*.

In his own words, he did freelancing 'right this time' and this book comes from a realization that in the three years that have passed - this *second time around* as a freelancer - the business has generated over \$1.1M. This debut, feature length book lays out the five phases of **evolutionary growth** that made this possible along with honest, action-oriented advice for implementing it in your own freelance business.

Oh, and he hates writing in third person.



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Foreword

It's ironic that the final chapter added to a book is often the *'foreword'*. That is certainly the case here as I enter the final throws of this life-dominating project. It's been a blast. Completely exhausting but fun all the same; now I can't wait to show you what I came up with.

Between appearances on podcasts, launch planning, producing videos and the small matter of getting the written ideas - some 50,000 words - into a logical order I've also had the small matter of managing a business.

The purpose of this book is not to show you how to build *an agency*, nor is it to improve the actual service you're providing, I'm making the assumption this is already the best it can be. This book is here to help give a fresh perspective in a space dominated by mediocrity.

Most advice for freelancers sucks, you'll hear me say that a lot. Please don't mistake this for arrogance or elitism though, I am acutely aware all of this content is well-meaning, it's just for the most part it keeps us hemmed into a freelancer mindset.

I could have opted to entitle this book '101 ways to grow your freelance business' quite easily; maybe more people would have bought it.

Who knows, the point is, I didn't because I want more for you than that.

To do so would be to keep you thinking the same way you already are, bouncing around the freelancer echo chamber like a plucky, yet unlucky pinball. This book is for you if you want to be more than just "doing okay" this time next year.

Deep down we're all looking to achieve the same thing, freedom (in all its guises) and I've poured the last three months of my life into giving you the best chance of making that happen.

I've built something incredible from my tiny freelance business. I realized that chasing down ambiguous words like "growth" stopped me from putting in place constant, small goals.

I have a better word, *evolution* and I've witnessed all five phases of it. Mastering each will take you closer to your goals; all you have to do is stop thinking like a freelancer.

To the fire of ambition that lies within you

Learning the hard way: freelancing is rough

*“F**k freelancing”, I said.*

It was 11 p.m. on a gloomy Saturday in February 2009, and the final ‘no’ in a series of four negative responses flashed into my inbox. This was prospective client work I’d pegged my hopes on winning. **I was officially done as a freelance designer.**

With no new work on the horizon and without a financial buffer, I’d reached the end. It was time to throw in the towel, call time out and drag my sorry ass in the direction of full-time employment.

The slippery slope was greased around 12 months earlier. Indeed, 2008 was a dark year for me; I had found myself peering over the edge financially on a number of occasions, playing the usual ‘robbing Peter to pay Paul’ games that everyone with an unstable income is familiar with.

I’d been self-employed for all of my adult life, doing what I supposed that *try-hard entrepreneurs* did, flipping from opportunity to opportunity without one ever *really* connecting.

I was finding it difficult to admit, or even articulate, that I had a weakness.

Something just wasn't right. No amount of "freelancer advice" (inverted commas intentional) seemed to make a difference.

The last few months of 2008 and the first few months 2009 would prove to be the final stretch of a pivotal downward spiral. I was a good designer, and my clients were generally happy with my work. I just couldn't get *enough clients* on a monthly basis to make freelancing pay.

In the end, I was consistently earning **less than I would as an employee** of someone else's business. As you probably know, *that* feeling and *that realization* really, truly sucks.

My freelance design venture was generally failing. Worse, it was dragging down my heart, soul and bank balance with it.

Shadowy figures

September 2008 was particularly somber, and it came to a head one murky Tuesday. I heard a rap on the door, which ordinarily I'd have ignored due to looming overdue bills. But I was expecting a package from a client; a delivery which I assumed would need a signature.

Wrong guess.

What stood before me was the archetypal grim reaper of finance. Head to toe in black, wearing a chunky bomber jacket and sporting a heavy build.

Clipboard in hand and with polished black steel-capped boots, which shone up from the damp doorstep.

A *bailiff* had arrived to take stock of my worldly possessions. Fortunately for me, I didn't have much to show at the time (if you can call that fortunate). Yet the humiliation of this ultimate invasion was something I'll never forget.

I managed to hold off the inevitable for a few more months, furiously spinning on hamster wheel until that final high pitch 'blip' of rejection hit my inbox in February.

And there I was. Staring at a blinking cursor, brooding over a way to reply without including an 'F' and a 'U'.

I had failed to stem the leak in my freelance business, and it was to prove fatal.

*"F**k freelancing", I said.*

Why you should read this book

This was a low point, sure. But, as I will explain in the following pages, I turned it around. That doesn't mean I'm on some self-indulgent ego-crusade to toot my own horn. After all, you don't care about me, or my story. That's cool. I'm just another guy you found on the Internet.

But you *do* care about keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. You hate it when you can't be 100% sure that those responsibilities will be taken care of two months from now.

I understand that. That's why I wrote this book – and it's why you should read it.

I'm still '*in the field*.' I'm not some faceless, distant, self-proclaimed guru whose primary business is selling information to you instead of selling a service to clients.

I still head up Tone Agency. I still take on one freelance project per month, and I still hustle. Granted, I'm not a slave to money any more. But let's just say that I don't work four hours a week, either.

My intention is to describe my experiences and provide inspiration and practical advice for putting them to work in your business. These experiences have led to an enormous amount of financial freedom and professional predictability for me...

... something I could only dream about before.

A tie, a brave face and a turning point

Let's rewind back to 2009, when I figured my freelance career was toast.

I pulled down my website, and threw on a tie and a brave face. In March, I took up a position with a 400+ employee corporation on their digital team.

What I encountered was a *beast with a split personality*. What hid beneath the bureaucracy, rules and a herd of zombie employees was cutting-edge strategy, vision, big ideas and a ruthless pursuit of **growth**.

Since the 'dog-walking school' venture I started at 11 years old, I'd been involved in some sort of business almost continually. Yet I'd never really been *in* a business. There's a difference.

So while the fidgety, creative, freelancer side of me hated the stifling bureaucracy, the more instinctive entrepreneur within me was thriving.

I began to notice patterns, and slowly realized that this defining moment – the bailiff's fateful knock at the door – actually had a silver lining. ***This was how you 'did' business.*** I had acquired an insight to the inner workings of the corporate machine that I likely wouldn't have found while working by myself.

It was a resurgence of inspiration, and I devoured it raw. As the pieces of the jigsaw began to fall into place, the crescendo built.

I found myself at an all-staff meeting. It was in a long, cold conference room with 100 or so employees who had been summoned to listen to a lengthy presentation on the future of the business and its strategy.

While the zombies around me snored, doodled and generally did anything but listen, I was on the edge of my seat, a panting dog, tail wagging with ideas and brain whirring about how to translate all this information to a small-business context.

For me, this was solid gold. Half of me wanted to wave a hand in front of the eyes of my zombie colleagues to wake them up to the opportunities this insight could give them. The other, more selfish half of me wanted to absorb it all like a sponge, internalize it and put it into action immediately.

Then it hit me like a steam train. I had unearthed the weakness that led to my failure first time around. **I was thinking like a freelancer** and not thinking like a business. My **narrow business horizon** had prevented me from *evolving and growing* my way to success.

At the time, I wondered, what would happen if I took that same aggressive discipline toward a vision and market domination, and combined it with the agility, love and personality of a freelancer?

A vow to try again

I was 18 months into my corporate job and my restless mental cogs wouldn't stop spinning. I was connecting dots left and right, formulating a

unique business outlook that would later become the *five phases* of this book.

With an embryonic version of the *freelancer evolutionary growth cycle* in hand, I set about putting together a new part-time design business. I was motivated by one vow: to **try again, and do it properly this time.**

This time I was a brand. This time, I was different. This time, I was building a business destined for success.

Despite the still-fresh trauma of previous failure, I set about building a venture that fused the world of cold, harsh, real-world business practice with the kind of creativity, passion and care only found in a small business.

From accounting to customer service, from marketing to production, I ran my part-time “just me” design business with the strategic precision of a publicly traded company.

I noticed a dramatic difference. My new approach was immediately validated.

- **Month 1** - I earned enough to cover my time to set up the business at a reasonable hourly rate;
- **Month 3** - I surpassed my monthly salaried income for the first time;
- **Month 5** - I closed a deal that earned me three times my monthly salaried earnings.

In that month, I earned \$9,548. I scribbled that four-digit number all over my job wage slip, which totaled just over \$3,000.

Something had to give.

A crossroads

I had a simple, yet critical choice. Red pill or blue pill. Easy or hard.

In one direction was a stable, above-average salary at a simple job with minimal stress, and semi-enjoyable work.

In the other direction was a completely unpredictable route I'd followed to failure once before. This path had a guarantee of uncertainty, an absence of security and the maximum amount of stress I could expose myself to.

*“F**k it, back to freelancing”, I said.*

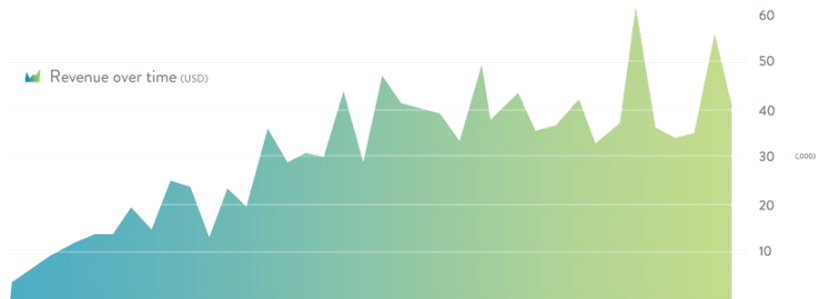
I'd been able to establish enough security with my one-person sideline business – at the time, offering web design for bands and the music industry – to take the measured leap.

On August 17, 2011, I founded Brandshank Ltd. as an official business entity.

I'm glad I did.

Just over three years ago I founded my “something” with nothing more than a laptop, a rented desk in a co-working space, ten digits at the end of two arms, and one vision. Today I have a self-sufficient, fun, growing web agency ([Tone](#)), along with other offshoots ([Brandshank](#) being one of them), all capable of operating – and growing – without my day-to-day presence.

I had to write this book. I had found the light that I'd lacked through all those dark years. I'd finally made freelancing work, and had \$1,112,409.09 in revenues to show for it. **I'd successfully evolved.**



(Chart shows monthly sales over the period, to \$1.1m in 3yr revenue)

Freelancing is tough enough already. So it's time for you to start thinking like a business. To **build a business that is evolution-ready** from the outset.

You may not want to build an agency like I did and this isn't the point of this book. You may not want to hire a team, and you may not want to deal with more than one client at a time. I accept that.

As we'll discover in this book, **growth is a relative concept**. It'll mean something different to you than it does to every other person picking up this book. One thing we can all agree on is that we need to feel momentum,

a constant state of progression and at least a sense that we'll hit our goals one day. That's why I don't call it "growth" any more; I call it *evolution* instead.

Growth vs Evolution

"For millions of years, mankind lived just like the animals. Then something happened which unleashed the power of our imagination."

Stephen Hawking

There are few words more ambiguous than “growth”. I use the word carefully and only in precise context. Otherwise, it’s a subjective can of worms.

Does “growth” mean growth in size? Growth in revenue? Growth in value? Growth in experience? Growth in success? Growth in reputation?

Or is it all of them? If so, which one do you tackle first? This cluster of grey areas often creates procrastination, especially with the one-person nature of a freelancer.

Sure, we want growth in revenue, but do we really want growth in size? We want to grow in experience, but some of us are happy being a boutique outfit. Do we really want *more* customers or just fewer that pay more?

This often leads to an unhelpful tug-of-war between regurgitated points of view bounced around inside the tiny “freelancer blog” echo chamber. This just skews the issue and leads to a whole heap of nothing.

No growth in size, revenue, experience, value, success or reputation.

No action. No progression. Nothing, nothing, nothing.

Just blindly aiming for growth is no longer an option. We need to try something else. I have a new concept. I call it **evolution**.

Evolution is worth aiming for. Evolution means constantly improving. Evolution is tangible, impactful, exciting. Growth is good, of course, but the word itself is easy to misinterpret and overanalyze. Evolution is worth pursuing.

You're too busy for bad news. If you're constantly improving through evolution, you build momentum and good news at every milestone.

When applied to business, evolution is the art of building something you can look back on in six months and say "Hey, that's different, that is an improvement."

Here's the big idea in 26 words:

This book will teach you how to stop thinking like a freelancer, start thinking like a business and evolve your way to your own, unique goals.

Your time to push forward

"I will go anywhere, provided it be forward."

David Livingstone, Explorer

At **Freelancelift**, I teach these principles and have been blown away by the response. I thrive on the effect these ideas have had on over 5,000 fellow freelancers who are all trying to push forward, innovate and evolve in a tough space.

The principles in this book are a combination of my story and the stories of other top-bracket freelancers who have broken away from the *up-then-down* income rollercoaster. I interviewed all of them in preparation for this book and on the Freelancelift podcast, so I could piece together the most comprehensive, honest guidance I could. All of whom are now firmly in the 'top bracket' I'd like to see you exist in. Some of them I now count as friends.

I have experienced all five phases of the *freelancer evolutionary growth cycle*, and in this book you'll read stories, examples and practical advice that will help you map out your own evolutionary path.

Your time is now. As a one-person business, it's easy to think that you're somehow exempt from that word... 'business'.

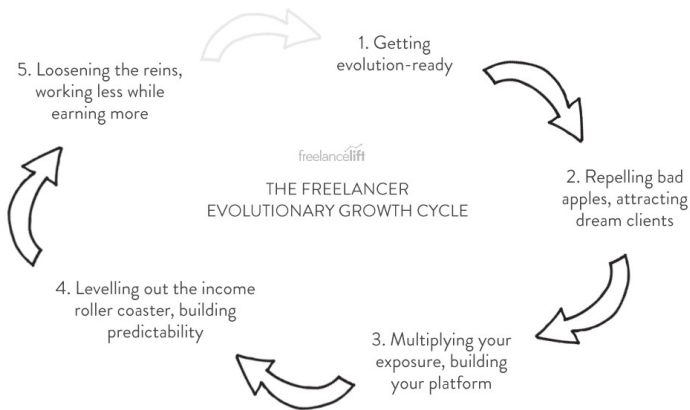
I'm here to tell you this is what keeps most freelancers thinking like, well, freelancers. Screw that! You have a product (your craft), you have bills and

overheads, you have customers, you need to deliver your product efficiently, you need to find new clients and you need to turn a profit to survive.

Sound familiar? Yup, you're a business. It's the same for you as it is for Google, Facebook and MegaCorp Inc. So why do most freelancers limit themselves to run-of-the-mill freelancer blogs, same-same books and so-so advice that perpetuate the same message continually?

You need to think bigger. You need to stop thinking like a freelancer.

The freelancer evolutionary growth cycle



It starts by understanding that you should frame your growth as ‘evolutionary’, which can best be described as “always getting better”. There are five distinct phases, but since “getting better” never stops, the process is cyclical.

What I’ll teach you in this book will ensure that you can grow through these phases quicker and quicker with each revolution while making a real impact on your tiny business in the process.

You can expect to double or triple the revenue you're making with each lap of the cycle. Evolution never stops. Understanding this will make it easier for you to chart your progress and work on *what really matters* rather than endlessly debating about your interpretation of the word "growth".

You can cycle through these phases at your own pace. This doesn't have to be a year-long piece of work, so don't be too afraid to attack more than one evolutionary phase at once.

Just don't tell Charles Darwin you upended his theory.

What follows is a quick overview of each phase.

Phase I - Get evolution-ready

A typical comment I hear from freelancers is:

“I do okay, but feel like I’m treading water.”

My answer generally goes like this: “I hear you, but think for a second. How do you *really* know how you're doing?”

Sure, your revenue is the same on average, and you feel there is a lack of progression there. But is your quality of life better? Do you have more freedom? Are you working less? Are you more skilled than you were last month? Is your pipeline looking healthier?

When looking at it with the right attitude, the issue really should not so much be a *lack of achievement*, but more a *lack of understanding* of the **stage of your development**.

An evolution-ready business owner has foundations for success, she understands what her vision is, she has mapped a strategy to get there, and she understands that “getting better” never stops.

In this phase, we’ll address the underlying factors you need to have in place before even thinking about evolving your business. All this stuff – your mindset, your strategy, where you want to go – is often completely overlooked.

We're not talking about cumbersome, time-consuming business plans either. For a small, agile business, these are not worth the paper they're written on.

Things change quickly. We adapt to opportunities and make stuff up. Like that time you pretended you could do *that thing* for a client, just because you didn't want to say no and open the door for someone else – then frantically scoured Google to find a way to learn, quickly.

This is the best part: adapting, improving, learning, having fun plying our trade. It's the vibrancy that gets us out of bed in the morning. Yet, we still need to know the endgame – “*the why*”.

Why are we doing this? What are we aiming for? Why does that achievement matter? What does success look like?

If you don't know what you're aiming for, how will you ever know when you get there?

If your business isn't evolution-ready, you aren't taking the strategic steps required to *enforce* that upward trajectory.

When we fix that for you and you have clarity on what you can achieve, you can build a business around evolution, **not around you**. By doing so, you'll be empowered to be objective and understand just how far you've come.

Phase II - Repel bad apples, attract dream clients

I have an inconvenient truth to put to you. If you have lower-paying, frustrating, impatient, *throw-them-out-the-window* type clients, **it's your fault.**

In the large majority of cases, it's *you* who decides the caliber of client you get.

You attracted them with your positioning, *you* had the final say on the price, *you* drew out the deliverables, *you* agreed to the deadlines, and *you* control how you're perceived online.

I hate to break it to you. It's not them. It's you.

This phenomenon reminds me of the “quit hitting yourself” game we used to play with our siblings when we were kids. You're beating yourself around the head with your own brand, slapping all the fun out of freelancing.

This is compounded by the fact that you are spending an inordinate amount of time going out to find work, and only this current sorry crop of clients says yes.

Your freelance business has a fundamental issue with *perception*. You're attracting bad apples. It's time to change that.

A prospective client's perception of your pricing, value, quality, reliability and skill can *all be influenced*, and in most cases radically changed.

By engineering your professional image, you'll repel these bad apples and only attract the clients you want to work with. You'll build a pipeline of dream clients who *find you*, are relaxed and pay ten times more than the '*awkwards*'.

Phase III - Multiply exposure, build your platform

I know the feeling of hopelessly refreshing the screen of a virtually blank Google Analytics profile, only to see the blue-line chart keep looking more like low-lying hills than an epic mountain range.

About six months ago, I put together a free short book entitled “**Why Nobody Knows your Name**”. Articulating the main issues in this way has helped make things a little clearer for everyone who downloaded it. But I wanted to go deeper.

Have you ever stopped to wonder how ‘A list’ freelancers ended up where they are? Was it a ‘*time in the game*’ thing? Maybe. Was it luck? Maybe.

Or was it that they committed to *actually being vocal* in their space, building a reputation by providing value at every opportunity, and shouting about that value online?

A great online reputation can be a significant multiplier when it comes to setting a price for your work, so it pays to get it right.

Phase IV - Level out the income rollercoaster, build predictability into the model

Some weeks are great, but in others you feel the pinch. The difficulty is that you want the *good* weeks to be more frequent, but instead it's more bad weeks than good. This up-and-down uncertainty is usually the reason freelancers give for throwing in the towel.

So why do we allow this? Why do we work so hard to win a client, then happily bid them goodbye after the project is over?

Then why don't we diversify our channels of income?

The difficulty is that freelancing (when done the way we're *told to*) is an inherently unpredictable game. We drag this disadvantage around with us like an invisible ball and chain, yet we change nothing.

You should be building relationship opportunities with clients and nurturing long-term partnerships to increase the likelihood that they will spend their dollars to hire you again and again. You should create side projects that deliver revenue even in slow weeks. You should understand the importance of customer lifetime value.

Money isn't everything, but it brings security, comfort, reassurance and the material things in life.

If the financials of your business are stable, you can enjoy your craft and do something you love, while knowing that the financial elephant in the room is at least well fed.

Phase V – Loosen the reins, work less, earn more

Freelancers wear lots of hats. We occupy every role in our businesses. It's exhausting. We're responsible for sales, marketing customer service, production, accounts and everything in between.

We certainly didn't apply for this 'Chief Octopus' role. When it gets in the way of focusing on what really matters, it becomes a real threat to the business.

Have you ever wondered why you wear all these hats? Are you the best person for *that* job? Does it contribute to your bottom line? Could you move that along to someone less qualified, but who has more time to dedicate to it?

Your business has an infrastructure problem. It simply isn't equipped to deal with life *without you in it*. What processes are in play, and how could these be made more efficient? Could you do things more quickly, hire a remote team, or take advantage of specialized software?

In this phase, we'll seek to build a well-oiled machine that enables you to offload about 30% of your day-to-day time commitments, without losing revenue.

The best part about evolution is that even reaching the end of the final phase doesn't signal the end for you. You'll be earning more, yes, but you need to re-map your goals and get yourself evolution-ready all over again.

I'm excited to walk you through this. So let's begin.

Download full versions of the tools, resources and worksheets that support this book, by heading to freelancelift.com/book

Phase I

Get evolution-ready

What is your intent?

As the hills rolled by, Jeff and his wife were reaching the end of their cross Country jaunt from New York to Seattle. With tired eyes they reached their destination, turning the ageing blue sedan into the driveway of their new home.

What stood before Jeff was the start of a new chapter in his life, it was 1994 and he'd just quit his '*fairly well paid*' job in New York to work on something more meaningful.

Jeff was born in Albuquerque New Mexico, USA and had a relatively normal upbringing. He had a keen interest in computing that would eventually take him to Princeton University.

Sure, Jeff was smart but his peers were too. Jeff though had something his classmates did not, **a vision, backed by intent.**

Intent is drive; intent is passion and a yearning towards an audacious goal. Intent is what inspires us to keep going even on the bad days and its something I want to instill in you.

As Jeff lifted open the garage door with a creak, he glanced down at the paper he'd scribbled on through the duration of the trip. Staring back was his intent, his vision to create '*Earth's biggest bookstore*' from that few square feet of cold garage. He'd given up everything.

Sure, he wasn't completely certain how he would make that rise - especially with the uncertainty of the new world of '*The Internet*'. Of course there were bumps along the way and there would be challenges to come, but **that vision and fire** didn't change.

You see Jeff built a business that was *evolution-ready* from the outset with an unflinching vision of where he wanted it to go.

That mission still stands today, and from his garage he created something remarkable. Jeff Bezos is the (now billionaire) founder, CEO and Chairman of Amazon.com.

In this phase the objective is to figure out **what we want to achieve** and what will need to change to make that so.

Your 'one-page of intent'

The stories, advice and ideas which follow will give you the searching questions required to achieve the insight, clarity and perspective you'll need to complete **a simple strategy sheet**, your 'one page of intent'.

This purposeful plan we'll complete at the end of the chapter so for now just absorb the concepts as they arise and we'll recap and make it actionable at the end.

Being *reactive* in our business exploits will only take us so far. It's time *get deliberate, commit to getting better* and leverage the power of **evolutionary intent**.

Preparing for a constant state of improvement

I established in the previous chapter that “growth” is an extremely subjective concept. I get an equivalent ‘shudder’ when it comes to defining other such meaningless concepts. “*Moving to the next level*” they say, “*Taking it a step further*” they cry, “*Scale up*”, they chant.

Like a raucous stock market floor, these words are all noise and no meaning unless you provide appropriate context or attach them to *something meaningful* in your life and in your business. When these statements are not quantified it leaves us grasping for the next big move, in a position I call ‘Maintenance Mode’.

If you can’t immediately point to a specific action you took this week that furthered and evolved your business then you’ll probably find you’re in Maintenance Mode with your freelance business. Stuck on a plateau, static financially yet furiously spinning the hamster wheel. Unclear on the most effective ‘to do’ action to tackle next.

I want to help you break from that habit of churning out the same actions day to day; *Maintenance Mode* is the root cause of that frustrating ‘treading water’ feeling.

The goal of this book is to get you thinking in terms of evolution, of living in a constant state of improvement, of **continually getting better**, overcoming Maintenance Mode and achieving positive action.

It's up to you to determine what 'getting better' actually means to you though:

- Does 'getting better' mean more money? Great, how much?
- Does 'getting better' mean more clients? How many?
- Does 'getting better' mean working less? Perfect, what will you do with the time?
- Does 'getting better' mean working on projects you really enjoy? What work makes you most happy, and with what type of client?

As you can see when you talk about 'getting better' or evolving as a freelance business, you will get one answer from one person, and a different answer from another.

You need to prepare yourself for charting what that means to **you**.

There is no *one size fits all* guidance here. We're all looking for that piece of the jigsaw that'll fall in our lap, more often than not it doesn't happen, so take advice and run with it, try stuff.

It's a common trait of the ultra-successful to focus on *continually getting better* rather than *being the best*. In 1994 Barnes & Noble were the undisputed heavyweight champions of the book world, did that stop Jeff Bezos?

This is why I advocate *continual testing, regular evaluation and structured improvement* as an approach. This needn't be scary though, I appreciate that terminology smacks of the 'buzzwords' we're trying to move away from.

What we're talking about here is a **continual growth towards a goal** (whatever that goal is for your specific situation) and regular review of some key benchmarks to ensure you're getting a regular pat on the back. Understand that its *up to you alone* to ensure you're continually improving and you should know where you'd like that improvement to lead.

No journey succeeds without a map

I love to travel. In the past 18 months alone I've visited four continents and clocked up 48,427 miles - that's equivalent to flying the circumference of the planet, twice.

Throughout all of these trips there has been one constant (and I'm not talking about the extreme discomfort and poor quality food); each journey had a **defined endpoint**, a destination to mark the trip complete.

Had I not marked out a destination, and commenced the journey without a map or a clear path to my endpoint I would have been a mere nomad.

The Nomadic lifestyle won't help your business

In business, a nomadic lifestyle - continually being *reactive* to environments, moving on when times get tough to an *indeterminate location* – almost always ends in failure.

Whether this is a slow downward spiral (in my case 2 years in the making) or a chain of events more swift and severe the fact remains. If you do not have a map (a vision, with strategy outlined) or a destination (a clear business goal or objective) you will find it difficult to succeed in business.

Remember, you are not exempt from 'being in business' just because you're a freelancer. This mentality keeps freelancers from breaking free of *the up-then-down* income roller coaster cycle, boxes us into Maintenance

Mode and produces that feeling of ‘treading water’ and ultimate dissatisfaction with our craft.

With these higher-level concepts addressed, lets move into some specific examples and actionable ideas.

Know where you want to go (ditch the business plan)

It's fortunate that the 'business plan' as it was (an overly complex, cumbersome, often pointless exercise) is a thing of the past. Who wants to put together vague forecasts and meandering analyses over 50 pages anyway?

At Tone and my other brick & mortar businesses every time I've been forced to complete one (banking, funding) they have been out of date and superseded almost as quickly as they're created.

In his book 'Rework' Jason Fried - founder of Basecamp/37Signals - advocates a 'lean approach' to business objectives. Working to small, short term goals and knocking them down regularly to achieve a constant state of momentum.

In this phase, we'll work towards creating our '***one page of intent***'. A simple, short, adaptable version of the *tired ol'* business plan.

Armed with this briefest of maps you can make *short term goals* that ensure you can continually reflect on "getting better"

Your objective, what does evolution mean to you?

Before embarking on any business venture that key question is crucial. Indeed, so crucial and so seemingly obvious it's often glossed over as a no brainer. A normal conversation with the freelancers I speak to when I'm coaching and supporting would go something like this:

"Well, evolution to me means more money of course?"

Really? Is that the main reason, why is that important?

"Umm so I can live well and buy nice things"

Okay, I guess we're getting closer, but why is that important?

"Well, so I can spend more time with my family, work less, go on vacations and drive a great car"

Now we're talking – money is the means to the end you're dreaming of. So how much money do you need on a monthly basis to make that happen?

"I'd say to cover my costs, plus living expenses, a car lease plus an amount disposable for holidays and such I'd need about \$8,000 per month."

So "earning \$8,000 per month to live well and do things with family" is the goal (in this example) not 'earning more money'.

This should be what you look to as 'evolution'.

Both statements technically say the same thing, yet one will **inspire action** while the other is too vague and impossible to measure your progress against.

You should see your business as the vehicle for making that journey from where you are now to living the life you want to. That is to say, like any journey **you can only really begin once you've established exactly where you're going.**

Try it for yourself, ask why you set out freelancing in the first place, what does evolution mean to you? Then ask “and why is that important?” four or five times to arrive at your real, underlying, specific goal.

It's the same whether your underlying goal is to have more time, more money or more satisfaction in your craft. You can always dig deeper to **quantify the specifics.**

We'll make this your *destination*, to be utilized within your one page of intent.

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Stop thinking like a freelancer
The Evolution of a \$1m web designer

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