

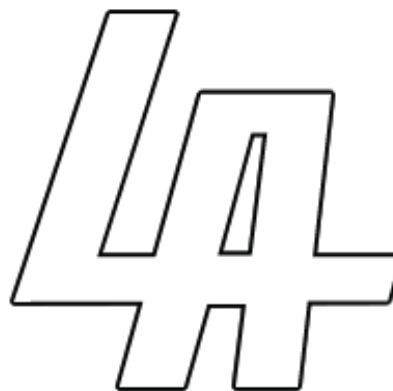
Freedom, Money, Time *and the Key to Creative Success*



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Lateral Action



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1. The Basic Problem

A creative person needs three things to be happy:

1. **Freedom** — to do what you want, when you want and how you want it. Not just in holidays and spare time — but also doing meaningful work, in your own way.
2. **Money** — to maintain your independence and fund your creative projects. Of course you want a nice place to live, but you're not so worried about a bigger car than the guy next door. You'd rather spend money on experiences than status symbols.
3. **Time** — to spend as you please, exploring the world and allowing your mind to wander in search of new ideas.

Usually, you're lucky if you get two out of the three. But if one of them is missing, it compromises the other two.

Without money, you don't have much freedom, because you have to spend your time chasing cash.

Without time off, money doesn't buy you a lot of freedom.

And if you're doing something you hate for a living, it doesn't matter how big your salary is, or how much holiday you get. You still feel trapped.

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What makes things harder is that most of the world seems to be trying to do things in a different order to us. Think of all the people you know who sacrifice most of their time to earning money, promising themselves freedom in the distant future.

And we're supposed to be the strange ones.

In this ebook I'll tell you about my own struggles to find the right combination of freedom, money and time.

I'll share some of the lessons about creativity, work and life I learned the hard way. If they are new to you, I hope my words will help you learn them more quickly than I did.

But before we go any further I'd just like to clarify what I mean by a 'creative person'.

I mean someone who takes a creative approach to work and life. Someone who works hard, but because they love what they do, it doesn't really feel like work.

They may be an artist, writer, designer, musician, actor, filmmaker — or working in any of the other artistic professions.

Equally, they could be a coach, scientist, cook, entrepreneur, healthcare professional — or tackling complex, meaningful, inspiring challenges in another field.

If that sounds like you, and you'd like a little more freedom, money and time in your life, read on.

2. Freedom

“If you want to be a writer, you’ll need to get a proper job as well.”

This was the general consensus when I first announced my creative ambitions, twenty years ago. And it didn’t help my commercial prospects that by ‘writer’, I meant ‘poet’.

It wasn’t what I wanted to hear. But I knuckled down and got a job in publishing. Not a bad job — the people were nice, the money was OK, bits of the work were interesting.

But it made me ill. Literally. I got cold after cold, bug after bug, until I realised it was the job that was bugging me.

Fortunately, I had a Plan B: hypnosis.

I enrolled to train as a hypnotherapist, and spent my weekends in London learning mind-boggling hypnotic inductions and techniques. In the evenings I devoured books with titles like *The Psychobiology of Mind-Body Healing* and worked on my essays. Once I gained my diploma I started seeing clients one evening a week, at the local health club.

Then one day, the news we’d been expecting for months was confirmed: our department was to fold and we would all be made redundant. I walked through the office past ashen faces, locked myself in the toilet and jumped for joy.

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I opted for the traditional route and went to London to seek my fortune. I set up shop in a fancy Notting Hill clinic, charging an hourly fee equal to a day's wages at my old job.

There, I worked with all kinds of people — bankers, hippies, drug addicts, estate agents, lawyers, venture capitalists, rock stars (real ones, not the social media kind).

And artists. I loved working with the artists, writers, actors, film-makers. The ones working on amazing creative projects. The ones who really inspired me. The ones who told me I inspired them.

The trouble was, I was getting better and better at the work, but not richer and richer.

It was an odd experience. One minute, I'd be working with a client, full of enthusiasm and energy, seeing how much they valued the work, how delighted they were with the changes they were making. Then they'd leave, and I'd be left scratching my head wondering how to find another client like that.

One problem with therapy? My clients weren't in a hurry to talk about their success. Sadly, it's hard for people to admit to having therapy, at least in the UK. Seth Godin tells us "ideas that spread, win" — and I couldn't see the therapy idea spreading very fast.

Not unless I became one of those 'pushy' therapists who wrote the tacky books, whose names were always in the magazines, and whose faces were always on TV.

And I definitely didn't want to be one of *those* therapists.

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The *real* problem with therapy? *I* wasn't in a hurry to talk about my success.

Things got a little easier when I started using the word 'coaching' to describe my work with artists and creatives, on the basis that most of them didn't have psychological problems, they just needed some help with their professional challenges.

One thing that did work pretty well was writing magazine articles about creativity and communication skills. Editors were pleased to get the articles, and some of them *paid me handsomely* for the privilege of writing what was effectively an advert for my business in their magazine! Each time an article came out, it brought me new clients.

But I had the same problem with editors as I did with clients: once I found one and delivered great work for them, that was it. They didn't need another article, I needed another magazine.

In an ideal world I'd have run my own magazine, but this was the 1990s, when you needed a fortune to start your own magazine. The thought never crossed my mind.

So I endured the 'feast and famine' cycle known to freelancers the world over. Financial insecurity meant it felt hard to justify spending time on my own writing, and when I did it was hard to concentrate. I wasn't exactly setting the literary world on fire.

In theory I was my own boss, with the freedom to do as I pleased. But without the money or time to enjoy it, it didn't feel like freedom. And the better I got at helping clients, the more the question gnawed at me: *If I'm so good at what I do, how come I'm usually broke?*

Learn from My Mistakes (Part 1)

It's not enough to be really good at what you do

It's not even enough to be amazing at it. Delighting your clients or customers is only the first step. It's a necessary-but-not-sufficient condition for success.

This doesn't feel fair. It cost me a lot to qualify as a psychotherapist — time, money, hard work and a lot of what Seth Godin calls 'emotional labor'.

I'm sure the same is true of your work — learning your craft and acquiring your skills took years of effort, trial and error. When you finally broke through and realised *you could do it*, it felt like you'd arrived. And now I'm telling you it's not enough.

I'm sorry if this is bad news. I didn't make it this way. It's just the way it is.

Your market may be next door to your first love

Poetry is my true love, as far as creativity is concerned. But nobody spends money — not real money — on poetry. So I've still not figured out a way to earn a living writing poems. And if I'd decided to coach poets exclusively, I'd never have had enough clients. I'd have stood a better chance by including all types of writer. But by including artists, creatives and entrepreneurs in my target market, I could create a sustainable business.

Could *your* business benefit from widening your focus and looking for opportunities 'next door' to your core passions?

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Sharing your knowledge is the best advertising

No disrespect to Yellow Pages, but it never really worked for me. In my early years I would dutifully buy an ad every year, on the assumption that I needed to advertise if I wanted to bring in business. But when I looked at the psychotherapy listings, and saw all the ads just like mine, I wondered what would make clients pick my ad over the others. And to judge from the results, the clients were wondering the same thing.

But when I wrote an article where I shared what I knew, giving concrete examples and practical tips, it brought the telephone to life. And enquirers were respectful, curious, keen to talk. To them, I wasn't some random trader hawking his wares in the classifieds — because I was a published writer, I was an authority. Someone they could trust.

'The media' can be useful, but don't count on it

It feels old-fashioned writing *the* media, but when I was younger, it felt like a monolithic entity. It meant the TV, radio, newspapers, glossy magazines and big budget movies. For those of us with artistic ambitions, the media was a magical kingdom floating in the air, where the stars looked down on the rest of us. So seeing my words in a national newspaper or magazine felt like a Very Big Deal. It was also pretty good for business.

But the media has its own agenda. You may be flavour of the month this month, but next month will not be this month. Unless someone deems you worthy of a regular column or multi-album deal, they move on. So if your game plan rests on a kindly manager, agent, editor or impresario reaching down from on high and whisking you up into the heavens, you might want to have a Plan B handy, just in case.

3. Money

I could sense John's smile at the other end of the phone.

He wanted to know if I'd like to earn a large cheque by assisting him on a business training for a large telecoms company. I wouldn't have to do much, just follow his teaching and help the delegates with activities on communication and coaching skills.

To a lot of people, this question would be a no-brainer, especially if they'd been struggling as hard as I had to make ends meet. But I'd always seen business as evil, and had done everything I could to avoid getting sucked into the corporate rat race.

But I trusted John. And I needed the money. And I had to admit I was curious ... what exactly went on behind those big glass doors? So I put on a suit and went to find out.

I was a bit nervous when I saw the seminar content. Compared to the psychotherapy trainings John and I had delivered together, it seemed very basic. It looked like we'd just be skimming the surface. Would the client really feel they were getting value for money?

Yet I was pleasantly surprised when the training began. The managers were eager to learn and grateful for the skills we taught them. As I learned about the problems they were facing, I saw how fresh our approach seemed to them. I started to understand what a difference it made to their work as managers. I realised how much value we were delivering to the company.

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That was the first of many trainings I worked on, at that company and others. Eventually, I was made partner in the small consultancy. I was working hard, learning new skills, seeing my work have an impact, not just on individuals but on whole teams and departments. And for the first time in my life, I was earning good money.

Until that is, our contracts started coming to an end, and there wasn't much sign of new ones on the horizon. I waited to see what my partners would do next, since I didn't have a clue where this kind of business came from.

Then they suggested *I* was the best person to find new clients.

I thought they were mad. I was the introverted poet, remember? How could I possibly become a pushy salesman?

I flapped for a bit, then asked myself another question: "*What would it be like if you succeeded?*" Things looked different after that. I stopped worrying about 'being a salesman' and started learning how to sell.

I read books and listened to CDs of extrovert salesmen, guys who were totally different to me — Zig Ziglar, Brian Tracy. It was a deliberate effort to stretch my personality in a new direction — like a piece of elastic, it didn't quite come back to the same shape.

I picked up the phone, over and over. I rang and rang and rang all day. I went to meetings. I wrote proposals. I was messed around. I persisted.

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I closed a sale. Then another. Then a big deal rolled in, with my name on it.

I tasted success.

Not only was I earning good money, I knew I'd defeated one of my Demons. The one with 'Business Is Evil' tattooed on his forehead and 'I'm No Good at Selling' on his rear.

But as the months went by, and I grew more confident, I felt my enthusiasm waning. I hated to admit it — just as I'd finally got myself some financial security — but my heart wasn't in the work any more.

The guy in the suit with the briefcase wasn't me. I'd wandered into someone else's life.

So I wandered out again.

Learn from My Mistakes (Part 2)

Your work may be worth more than you realise

I was amazed to discover what a big difference basic coaching skills training made for the managers I worked with. It wasn't as in-depth as a psychotherapy training, but my clients didn't need to transform people's lives. They needed to bring out their best performance at work. Our training helped them do that very well. Which made me good value for my handsome fee.

So if you're used to earning a certain amount of money for the time and effort you put in, don't assume that's all your work is worth. In a different context, the perceived value of your work could be a lot higher. Or if you could reach more customers, you could make more sales. Either way, you could be earning more money for less effort.

Let go of your prejudices

Because I despised the corporate world, I didn't bother learning the business skills that could have made a huge difference to my quality of life. In the end, corporate consulting wasn't for me, but it helped me learn skills that have stood me in good stead since. And it gave me the confidence to know I could succeed as a businessman as well as a coach.

So if you're self-employed and struggling, ask yourself whether you've *really* applied yourself to learning the business side of things — or whether there's a Demon standing in your way, tattooed with your prejudices about commercial success. What would your business — and life — look like if the Demon was no longer blocking your way?

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You can achieve more with partners

You've seen from the story that I didn't do it all myself. John and Roy, our other partner, taught me how to prepare and deliver a professional service. They also explained how the business side of things worked, and were on hand for advice while I was teaching myself sales. And because of the way the business was structured, we all made money from every seminar, whether we were delivering it personally or not.

What difference would it make if you had partners like that?

Sales without marketing is like surgery without an anaesthetic

There are situations where you'll take the surgery, anaesthetic or no. But they tend to fall into the 'life-threatening emergency' category. And unless you're faced with a 'business threatening emergency', you would be well advised to ignore my example and do some marketing before you try selling.

Marketing involves telling the world about your products or services, and attracting potential customers. It includes things like research, branding, advertising, pricing and promotions. **Sales** is about closing the deal. It's the bit where you explain to people what they'll get, how you will help them, and then ask them for money. Sorry if you knew that — but I'm afraid *I didn't have a clue* about the difference between the two. Faced with the problem of finding new clients, I unthinkingly went into 'sales mode', gritting my teeth and dialing my way through a list of cold prospects. It worked, but it's not an experience I want to repeat.

But if you get marketing right, selling can be easy. The next chapter explains how I discovered a way to market myself for peanuts — and had a lot of fun in the process.

4. Time

As I boarded the empty tube carriage, the salmon-pink pages of the *Financial Times* caught my eye. Not my usual reading matter. But I did a double-take when I saw the header: *Creative Business*.

Turning the pages, I found articles about advertising, computer games, intellectual property, digital media. And creativity. It was a new weekly supplement, devoted entirely to the creative industries. I was engrossed. And as I read, an exciting thought was forming at the back of my mind:

If the Financial Times is devoting space to creativity, there must be money in it.

And there is. A few years ago, a [Work Foundation Report](#) valued the “global market value of industries that rely heavily on creative and cultural inputs” at \$1.3 trillion.

I decided to go for it and focus 100% percent on servicing [creative industries](#) businesses — advertising, television, computer games, design, film, music and so on. It felt like the perfect way to marry my business interests and my work with artists and creatives.

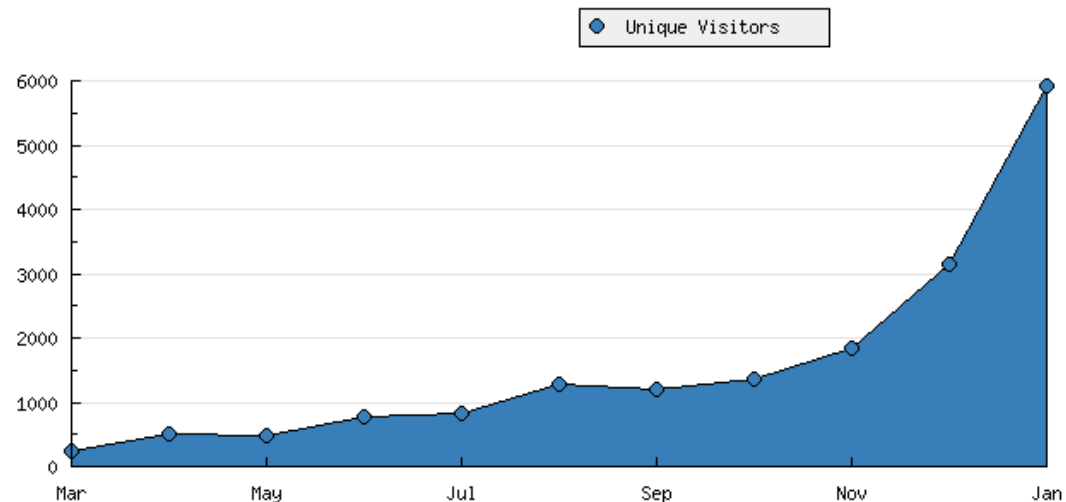
But I realised I would need more than coaching skills and enthusiasm. I was going to have to bite the bullet and learn about business. I was fed up feeling like a country bumpkin bamboozled by the big city slickers. Surely it wasn't rocket science?

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I went to the University of Warwick and studied for the MA in Creative and Media Enterprises. This was a different kind of business course — as well as traditional subjects such as strategy, organisation theory, marketing and entrepreneurship, we covered theories of creativity, intellectual property law and the creative economy.

While researching a marketing essay, I came across an [ebook](#) by Seth Godin, explaining how to build an audience and grow a business by publishing a blog on the internet. As soon as I read it, I knew I *had* to do this. Instead of interrupting people with cold calls, I could attract them by writing articles. Just like I did in the magazines — except this time, it would be *my* magazine.

On Valentine's Day 2006 I published my first blog post on my website www.wishfulthinking.co.uk. I'd had the site for two or three years, having written the sales copy myself and paid a designer to make it look professional. But it had generated hardly any visitors and zero clients. The best way to explain what happened next is to show you a chart (from [Statcounter](#)) of my website visitors during 2006.



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Now, I'm no statistician, but even I can see the trend here. From practically nothing, my web visitors grew slowly but steadily for several months. Towards the end of the year, things really took off and I was attracting 6,000 visitors a month. And the part of the site that was working the hardest was the part I built myself, using free WordPress software.

I experimented with Google Adwords, but stopped when I realised I no longer needed to advertise — because my blog meant I was already on the front page of Google for my chosen keywords.

And the clients started to roll in. To begin with, it was private individuals looking for coaching, but towards the end of the year I started getting regular enquiries from creative agencies and studios. The kind of companies I couldn't get to take my calls a few months ago were now *ringing me*.

The emails started like this: *"I've been reading your blog for a few months now, and it's become part of my professional development. So when we needed some training, you were the first person I thought of ..."*

Instead of having to hustle for a meeting, they invited me in. And in the meetings, I didn't really have to sell. Prospects treated me like a published author. They asked what I would *advise*.

One day I realised my website had become my main source of new business.

I found myself in airports, boardrooms, inner sanctums. On international conference calls. Talking to publishers about book deals. My second taste of success.

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But there was a problem with success: there was only one of me. I had to be on stage, in front of clients, in front of audiences, delivering a top performance, every time. I also had to be backstage, dealing with the equipment, the travel, the invoicing, the admin. Fixing the printer, making the coffee, chasing clients for documents, for payments.

Meanwhile the e-mail was piling up.

The day rate was great — but it wasn't the real day rate. Things always took longer than I budgeted for — even when I budgeted for things taking longer than I budgeted for. Taking time off felt like throwing money away.

I wrote my blog, it brought me work. Great. Then I got busy with clients, and neglected the blog. New business enquiries went quiet. Not so great. I needed a break, but I needed to keep writing the blog to bring in clients. Not to mention dealing with the printer, the e-mail, the invoicing, the travel arrangements...

It started to feel like a treadmill.

On the one hand, I had everything I'd always wanted — I was getting paid to do what I loved, for clients who loved the work. I was also writing for an enthusiastic audience and seeing my influence grow.

On the other hand, I was shattered. I had the money and a kind of freedom, but no time to enjoy it. If I wasn't careful, my business was going to eat me alive. I had to find a new way of doing things.

Learn from My Mistakes (Part 3)

Success is harder than it looks

I'm not talking about achieving success, difficult as that is. I'm talking about dealing with it when it arrives. If you only have a few clients to service, it might not matter that there's only one of you, and your setup isn't all that efficient. But when things get busy, the hidden flaws in your system turn into glaring inefficiencies, and you can find yourself running faster and faster, but falling behind. At that point, you need to be prepared to reinvent the whole thing from the bottom up.

The wrong business model can crush you

A lot of my problems sprang from my business model. But since I didn't even know what a business model *was*, I didn't know how to fix it. In case you're wondering, a business model is a system for creating value and delivering it to customers.

For example, Tower Records and Apple were/are both in the consumer music business, but with very different business models. Tower's model was built around physical stores selling CDs and vinyl. Apple's model is built around a seamless system comprising a music player (iPod), software (iTunes) and a virtual online store. The difference between these models is a key reason why iTunes is booming while Tower Records folded. In other words, Apple's creativity isn't confined to designing beautiful products — it's about reinventing the rules of the game.

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In my case, I had gone from a private coaching model (selling my time by the hour) to a corporate consulting model (selling my time by the day). But I hit a ceiling due to the fact that there was only one of me and only so many days in the week.

So if you're working too hard for too little reward, it could be time to re-examine your business model. A new model could bring you more money, with less time and effort. And a business that looks less like Tower Records and more like iTunes.

Build your own media platform

My blog worked on the same principle as my magazine articles — marketing myself by publishing practical advice. Once people had benefited from my advice, they saw the value I offered — and those who wanted to take things further picked up the phone.

In one sense, blogging wasn't as prestigious as appearing in *Creative Review* or a national newspaper. But blogging had several key advantages over print journals:

- **Control** — As it was my show, I could publish as many articles as I wanted.
- **Subscription** — I offered my readers a free subscription via email or RSS. Within two years, I had 2,000 subscribers — enough to keep me in business.
- **Search traffic** — Blogs attract links from other sites, which to Google is a sign of authority. The more I blogged, the higher up the search rankings I climbed.
- **Momentum** — Links, traffic and subscribers accumulate. When I started, I reached a handful of readers. Now, I reach tens of thousands every month.

Not only that, it gave me the satisfaction of knowing that, finally, I was a professional writer. Without a proper job.

5. The Key to Creative Success

It's a truism that success takes a long time. But I can also remember the day my fortunes changed — right down to the very moment.

I was at home in my flat, having just put the phone down. I'd been cold-calling for months, working my way through a list of strangers' phone numbers, trying to reach decision-makers. I'd had plenty of meetings, but no new business to show for it.

But the call I'd just finished wasn't a cold call. The previous month, I'd travelled half the length of England, for a meeting with the HR Director of a large company. She requested a proposal for a pilot seminar, with the aim of rolling out an extensive programme.

I'd spent several days writing the proposal. But when I rang to discuss it she was unavailable. I rang several more times. Finally the phone was picked up by a PA who reluctantly put me through to one of the director's colleagues. She seemed outraged that I expected a response. *"We'll be in touch if we need anything else from you,"* she snapped, and hung up. I felt humiliated.

At that moment, I realised I could have any excuse I wanted for giving up.

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No one would blame me. My business partners knew how tough it was. Ditto my family and friends. I was pretty well guaranteed sympathy if I admitted failure.

But I didn't want excuses, sympathy, or failure. I wanted success. So I promised myself *I would do whatever it took to make this business work.*

I stopped asking myself whether I was wasting my time, and whether it was possible. Instead, I started asking myself *how* I could make it happen. I read everything I could about the corporate sales process. I developed a thicker skin for rejection.

And one day, I walked out of a meeting into the sunshine and rang my business partners — to tell them I had closed a deal.

In this case, the pilot actually happened. And it actually led to an extended programme that brought in more money than all my previous clients put together.

A few months into the programme, I asked my client what had made him choose us. "Well, it took several months for us to decide," he said, "and you were the only guy who kept calling me all the way through. So it seemed only fair to give you a chance."

In other words, what had separated me from the competition was *persistence*.

I may have been better than my competitors, but he had no way of knowing that for sure. And as we've seen, I was clueless about marketing so I was following the surgery-without-an-anaesthetic approach — cold calling. And as I later discovered, the consulting business model would prove to be unsustainable for me.

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So in spite of having no marketing strategy, no sales experience and the wrong business model, I succeeded — through sheer persistence and a willingness to learn along the way. And that persistence came from the decision I made at my lowest ebb, when instead of giving up, I chose to commit.

At that moment, I tipped the scales in my favour.

You've probably realised by now that there's no magic bullet, no magic formula, no foolproof system that leads to success. And no infallible guru to tell you what to do.

The real magic happens inside, in your mind and heart. Only you can commit to making your dream happen, whatever obstacles stand in your way. Only you can turn that key.

There's also more to success than commitment. The *creative* part of 'creative success' is about learning from your mistakes, finding new options and trying them out in practice. Varying your approach until you get the results you want.

If you want to know more about that kind of creativity, follow me through the looking-glass.

6. Through the Looking-Glass

It won't surprise you to learn I was a dreamer as a child. I read endless books of fantastic adventures set in strange lands. I dreamed of going through the looking-glass.

I never thought it would happen for real. Especially not when I had finally grown-up, committed to joining the real world and set my mind to running a business.

But an odd thing happened when I published my first blog post. I crossed the threshold into a new world, through the looking-glass of my laptop screen. A world where, a few moments after hitting the 'publish' button, I could see readers reading my words, and discussing them. A world where I found a global audience for my writing.

And it wasn't just online. I started going to coffee mornings and social media meetups, to meet complete strangers and people I'd already 'met' online. Each time I went to one of these events, it felt like we'd beamed down from the Starship Enterprise.

At a time when most of my friends were moving out of London, settling down and having kids, my social network was exploding. It was hard to explain my new world to my old friends. They told me it was 'antisocial' to spend all that time on the internet.

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As I acclimatised to this strange new world, I realised there were people earning a very good living in the looking-glass world.

Some were like me, generating leads for their offline business. They went online to find clients, then delivered products or services in 'real life'. Others ran purely digital businesses, sitting at home with their laptops, selling software, ebooks, training courses and consultations via Skype.

And then there were the artists, creating work in their studio (or studio flat) and selling it across the globe. As the *New York Times* put it, '[Suddenly, the world is their market.](#)'

Like [John T. Unger](#). John uses industrial welding equipment to create ornamental fire bowls and sculptures out of recycled propane tanks, and a laptop to find customers.

Or painter and illustrator [Natasha Wescoat](#), who markets her artwork online, not only to sell directly, but also for mainstream media exposure and agency connections.

Or artist and author [Hugh MacLeod](#). When Hugh worked in Manhattan as a copywriter he got into the habit of doodling on the back of business cards while sitting at the bar. The format stuck, and became the basis of his blog Gaping Void way back in 2001.

Hugh gives his cartoons away, on his blog and in his [daily cartoon newsletter](#) — and sells limited-edition prints to his fans. He's also used his blog to become the best-selling author of [Ignore Everybody and 39 Other Keys to Creativity](#).

Whatever the business, artists and creatives have an edge in the looking-glass world.

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Like me, a lot of people had evidently cottoned on to the fact that advertising wasn't the best way to find customers online. Instead, they were attracting attention using free blog articles, ebooks, podcasts, images, cool designs and nifty little software applications.

This is known as **content marketing**. In a nutshell, it means creating and giving away original media content that doesn't *look* like advertising — but *functions* like advertising.

For example, Matthew Inman creates hysterically funny cartoons and gives them away for free on his website [The Oatmeal](#). And because they are so cool and funny, lots of people show them to their friends, via Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites. When you visit his site, he offers to send you more cartoons for free. What's not to like?

As a result, Matthew builds a big mailing list. He also has a shop on his website, selling posters and mugs of his cartoons. And he has a book out soon. Not every visitor or subscriber will become a customer — but enough do to create a nice income stream. So Matthew gets to be a professional cartoonist, his website visitors get a good laugh for free, and his loyal customers are even more thrilled with their purchases. Win-win-win.

Not only that, but people like me, with audiences of our own, start *doing his marketing for him*, by linking to his website and recommending his stuff.

Is Matthew highly creative? Yes. Is he generous? Yes. Does he have a smart business strategy? You bet.

Even when Matthew gives away his cartoons for free, he's not really giving them away for free. They bring visitors to his website and subscribers to his mailing lists. In a

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nutshell, he's giving his work away in return for attention. Now that he has an audience, he's in a strong position to sell products, services or whatever else he wants.

Matthew's success illustrates one of the central paradoxes of internet marketing: **the less your media content looks like advertising, the more effective it will be as advertising.**

If he had started a website that was nothing more than an advert for his books and posters, how much traffic do you think he would get? Not much. But because he is (a) giving away something genuinely valuable and (b) making it easy for others to copy and share it, he's created a business that virtually markets itself. Welcome to the future.

And it doesn't just apply to artwork. Whatever the business you're in, content marketing can give you an edge. My own coaching business is just one example. Remember Hugh MacLeod? Before he started selling prints of his cartoons, he made a nice living using content marketing to sell [Savile Row suits](#), [South African Wine](#), a [Scottish feature film](#) and [enterprise software](#).

So content marketing is one of the biggest trends in internet marketing. And the experts at creating original media content are the artists and creatives. Which means **artists and creatives have an unfair advantage at internet marketing.**

But there's more to it than uploading some pictures to a blog and hanging out on Twitter. Content marketing involves strategy as well as creativity.

And the more I looked into content marketing, the more attention I paid to the work of Brian Clark.

7. An Improbable Partnership

Brian Clark is a writer and entrepreneur based in Texas. Tony Clark (no relation) is an illustrator, animator and programmer in North Carolina. I've never met either of them in person, but we were business partners for over two years. Here's how it happened.

Brian started a blog called [Copyblogger](#) in early 2006, almost exactly the same time as I started my Wishful Thinking blog. He got my attention (and subscription) the moment I saw the original tagline for Copyblogger: *How to sell with blogs and RSS*.

At that time, the idea of using blogs to *sell* things was heresy in the touchy-feely culture of the blogosphere. But for someone like me, looking to build a business, Brian's advice on copywriting and content marketing was pure gold. And I wasn't the only one.

I was pleased with my audience of a couple of thousand blog subscribers and the business it brought me, but that was nothing to the success of Copyblogger. Within a year, Brian had over 10,000 subscribers, and by the time we started working together, it had climbed to 50,000. (Today, Copyblogger's subscriber count is 140,000.)

Lateral Action

Not only was Brian a much more successful blogger than me, he was a seriously successful entrepreneur. He's used Copyblogger as a launchpad for a string of online businesses, selling software, e-learning and membership sites. It's a matter of public record that his online empire generates millions of dollars a year in profit — all done by a handful of partners working on laptops at home or in small offices.

So how did a poet in London end up in business with two American entrepreneurs?

Content marketing got me on Brian's radar. Using the principles I'd learned from Copyblogger, I wrote an ebook called *Time Management for Creative People* and gave it away as a free download. Brian was one of the first bloggers I sent it to. I woke up one Sunday morning to find he'd linked to it, sending me thousands of visitors overnight.

Once Brian linked to the ebook, lots of other bloggers followed, helping to make it my first big 'hit' — it has now been downloaded over 100,000 times, bringing me plenty of clients. What I didn't know was that Brian and Tony were planning a new site about creativity and productivity, and the ebook made them think of me as a potential collaborator.

Another piece of the jigsaw was Teaching Sells, Brian and Tony's course in creating e-learning. I was one of the first students, realising e-learning was the perfect format for me to translate my knowledge and skills into a digital product that I could sell — and scale my business without having to work longer hours (or clone myself).

I also realised I'd have a much better chance of success as part of a team. And of course, Brian and Tony were the ideal choice, but... I knew they must be inundated with offers.

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Then one Sunday morning I looked myself in the mirror and thought, “*Well, they aren’t mind readers. If you want to work with them, you’ll need to ask them.*” So I wrote them an email outlining my vision of an online course for creative people, and asking whether they’d be interested in collaborating.

I thought I’d have to wait several days for a reply, but later that Sunday afternoon I saw an email from Brian, beginning: “*In a word, absolutely.*” Next day we were talking on Skype, and within a week it was a done deal. Lateral Action was born.

We launched the site as a blog, using a series of animated videos scripted by Brian and brought to life by Tony. I got to be the voice of Jack, the young creative hero. It felt like I was working for Pixar — except this was my own company. I had to pinch myself.

My job was to be the ‘front man’, writing the blog to build our audience. As I blogged in consultation with Brian, I learned how content marketing really works, and to replicate the success of my ebook on a more consistent basis. It had taken two years to reach 2,000 subscribers at Wishful Thinking. Lateral Action passed that total within days.

And it finally got me off the treadmill of charging for my time. Because we were selling e-learning courses, the only limit on our income was the number of units we could sell. It felt strange but exciting to create something once, then earn more by selling multiple copies. As if I had been released from gravity.¹

¹ I’m writing this in Japan. We’re staying with my wife’s family, eating sushi, taking relaxing onsen baths and sleeping on tatami mats behind sliding screen doors. The anti-gravity effect means it’s as easy to write here as back home in London, where I gather the snow is making life a misery. And I know it’s an internet cliché, but it was nice to wake up this morning and discover I’d earned a few hundred dollars while I slept.

8. Why Become a Creative Entrepreneur?

What triggered my 'release from gravity' was shifting from a **freelancer**, working for hire on client projects, to a **creative entrepreneur**, developing my own products and selling them via my own media platform (the blog). This table shows how freedom, money and time play out for employees, freelancers and creative entrepreneurs.

	Employee	Freelancer	Creative Entrepreneur
Freedom	Depends on your boss.	Depends on the quantity and quality of your clients.	Depends on delighting your customers.
Money	Regular paycheck. Ceiling due to company pay structure.	Feast or famine is common. Ceiling due to hourly/daily rate and number of hours/days you can work.	No ceiling — the sky's the limit.
Time	Evenings, weekends and holiday entitlement. (Unless it's a workaholic culture.)	Time is money, so time off feels like money down the drain.	Long hours at first. But set things up right and later on you can take time off while still earning.

Lateral Action

Now it won't have escaped your notice that although it looks more fun (and profitable) to be a creative entrepreneur instead of an employee, entrepreneurship is traditionally seen as a riskier option. There's no ceiling on your income — but there's no floor either!

So if you're an employee, I'm not advocating a blind leap of faith, ditching your job to 'go it alone' as an entrepreneur. Many creative entrepreneurs start [building their empire in their spare time](#), only quitting their jobs once the business is earning good money.

If you're a freelancer or consultant I'd invite you to take a good look at the right-hand column. Because — unless you're an exceptional freelancer who attracts so many clients you can cherry-pick the best ones — the middle column can be the worst of both worlds:

- Many freelancers say leaving their job and taking on clients felt like exchanging one boss for several bosses.
- Like the employee, there's a ceiling on your income. Like the entrepreneur, there's no floor.
- Unlike the employee, you don't get paid holidays. Unlike the entrepreneur, when you stop working, you stop earning.

You don't need to abandon your clients or your day job to get started as an entrepreneur. I love working with clients — but I'm also building a business where they aren't my only source of income. It's not a black-and-white choice.

And don't get hung up on the word 'entrepreneur'. I know it sounds flashy and corporate, but in the original French it just means 'someone who undertakes something'. Someone who makes things happen. Someone who commits.

9. Your Guide to Creative Entrepreneurship

If you look at Brian and Tony's websites, you'll see they don't do consulting. You literally cannot buy their time. Yet I was in the privileged position of working with them, seeing first-hand what they did and getting feedback on my own work.

And over several weeks in the winter of 2009-10, I spent hours talking to Brian on Skype, quizzing him about his creative approach to business, and how to apply the same principles to any small business — such as an independent artist, a consultant, or a home-based entrepreneur. By the end, I had a roadmap in my head of how to design and run a business from scratch, using creativity, strategy, hard work and the internet.

"Well bully for you", you might think. But here's the cool part: *We recorded the entire thing.* Over 12 hours of audio interviews.

Not only that, Brian spent several hours interviewing Tony about the business and productivity systems he uses to keep their media empire running smoothly. Finally, Brian turned the tables and interviewed me about motivation, influencing skills and stress management for creative entrepreneurs.

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You've probably guessed we weren't doing this for our own amusement. We wanted to create an educational resource, a Creative Entrepreneur Roadmap for anyone who wants a business that gives them their own combination of freedom, money and time.

The kind of business that enables you to work when, where and how you like. Whether at home, in your studio or in a cafe on the other side of the world. The kind of business that helps you stop worrying about money and start making your creative dreams a reality.

If you want to learn more about creating that kind of business, I've written another free ebook that lifts the lid on those conversations. It explains the thinking behind the cartoon videos of Lou, Jack and Marla — and expands on the principles of creative entrepreneurship from the final video. (The videos are pretty cool too.)

It explains why you don't need an MBA, venture capital, an office, a factory, or employees to start a successful small enterprise. And outlines how to combine your creativity with effective strategy to produce outside results.

Essentially, I give you a preview of the Creative Entrepreneur Roadmap course. And the first chance to sign up when I shortly open the course to a new group of students.

Click the link to claim your copy of [*Marla's Guide to Creative Entrepreneurship*](#).

