

Book 10:

Disconnecting

**(\$40,000/month,
year 6)**

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Not Business Advice

How I made a million from my personal projects

Book 10: Disconnecting

(\$40,000/month, year 6)

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Introduction

I'm in my teenage bedroom. Looking at my globe lamp.

It's an old one, from a second hand store. Many countries have changed since. But somehow it makes it feel even more magical.

I spin it and place my finger randomly to stop it. I wonder if I'll ever visit that place and if my dreams will ever come true.

I pretend to not care, but I'm secretly trying to stop it somewhere cool. Like New York. Thailand. Or Colombia.

I turn to my laptop again. I'm stuck on a software bug that I can't solve for City Vibes.

I decide to take a break, grab my coat and go for a walk along the sea front. Sit down and look at the planes taking off and leaving.

I look at the planes and wonder where they're going. Something inside me wants to scream and yell and throw rocks at them. Beg them to take me with them.

The world is so big. And I want to fly away and explore it.

But right now it's late and I have to go home.

Recap

Somehow, through some hard work and a lot of luck, I managed to make my dreams a reality.

- In 2016 and 2017, I learnt how to code and built City Vibes. I spent two years building it but it went nowhere.
- In 2018, I built and launched 15 products and reached \$200/month.
- In 2019, I focused on Epilepsy Blocker and went down to \$100/month.
- In 2020, I moved to Italy, launched and grew CyberLeads to \$2k/month, doubled my salary and quit my job.
- In 2021, I moved from Milan to Sicily, and found the next lever of growth for CyberLeads, which was the productized service.
- In 2022, I launched the service and reached \$500k/year. I also moved my base to Cyprus and started traveling full time.
- In 2023, I stayed at \$500k/year, but built a team and removed myself from the business. Now I can enjoy life.

Part 1: Childhood dream

When I was in high school, I bought a book called "A fighter's heart".

I didn't really read books back then. But I bought it because I was bored at the airport with my mother. Waiting for our flight to go and see our family in London.

The book wasn't what I expected. I was expecting it to be the autobiography of a world champion. Something that would motivate me to train hard every day.

But it was actually the opposite.

It was about a person who decided to leave everything behind, career, friends and family, to travel the world and train.

He trained and fought in Muay Thai in Thailand. Brazilian Jiu Jitsu in Brazil. And MMA in the US.

He wasn't particularly talented or athletic. And he had just as many loses as he had wins.

But he could dig deep, scrap and fight hard. And that's what mattered to him. It wasn't about having a pretty record. It was about fighting hard and making himself proud.

I admired that guy. But I didn't envy him one bit.

It was a cool story to read, but I knew that I would never do the same. I would never sacrifice everything just to travel the world.

Luckily, the world changed so much in the next 10 years after reading this book, that I was able to build an online business and keep in touch with everyone while I travel the world myself.

Without being part of the elite. A sailor. Or a hippie.

I'm sure this has been said thousands of times over thousands of years, but I feel very lucky to have been born into my generation.

I was born too late to explore the oceans. Too early to explore space or immortality. But just in time to travel the world.

Just in time. Just.

Finding my spark again

Like most people, I felt like school was lame, boring and a waste of time. And that I was too cool for it.

But now that I had the time, I started revisiting everything with fresh eyes and it has been the exact opposite.

I was actually angry. How could school take the most interesting subjects in the world and make them boring.

I hated history. Now I couldn't stop reading history books. It felt like a form of time travel that I had available but ignored.

I hated ancient Greek and Latin. Now I was reading original Greek and Latin ancient texts alongside my translated versions.

I hated chemistry and biology. Now I bought a microscope, was collecting samples from the beach, or my own blood, to examine them.

I hated physics and only vaguely knew of the planets and the solar system. But now I had a telescope and saw them for myself.

Having the ancient texts and their translations side by side, made me feel like a scholar traveling thousands of years in the past.

Seeing my own white blood cells, roaming around, on patrol, working hard to protect me, was mind bending. That is me. And I am that.

Seeing Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury, from my own balcony, with my own telescope and eyes, was magical. I realized that they are real. They don't exist just in books. They are there.

I felt like a kid again, discovering the world. And not through a text book, like in school. But with my hands, eyes and senses.

Money helped too. I had time, low stress, could buy all the instruments I need, and even nerd out and go crazy.

For example, I bought ancient coins from Rome, Egypt and China. Rocks from the Moon and Mars. And even Meteors.

If I ever become rich, I want to have my own little museum.

Bronze age helmets. Sabertooth tiger bones. Samurai swords. Viking coins. Renaissance telescopes. And ancient papyri scrolls.

Giving everything away

I decided to do everything I always wanted to do. Even little things that sound stupid, childish and trivial.

Like going completely nomadic and homeless. Getting tattoos. Laser eye surgery. Lift and train martial arts again.

And, most importantly, give all of my possessions away. Everything apart from my future museum pieces, of course. They stayed at my mother's house in England.

For some reason, clutter always gave me anxiety. And having very little always gave me peace of mind.

I knew this from university. I remember sleeping on the floor for a whole year at 18, when I had first injured my back. I was happier sleeping on my fluffy living room carpet that I had bought from gypsies, than any anatomical bed I have ever tried.

I threw my glasses in a drawer. Shaved my head. And bought the same clothes for every day of the week.

I kept my laptop, phone and chargers. Five white and five black tshirts. Two pairs of jeans. Two pairs of shorts. My haircut and beard machine. Documents and passports.

I remember looking at my suitcase and smiling.

It felt amazing to see how little I needed.

Coming full circle

During this process, I felt like I was re-inventing myself.

But one day, after boxing practice, I caught my reflection in the mirror and realized that I was becoming my old self again.

"Oh, hey there my old friend. Haven't seen you in a while."

Apart from the beard and tattoos, somehow I looked similar to how I looked when I was in high school. Baggy clothes, buzz cut, mostly interested in fighting, traveling and experiences.

It was weird because I actually looked very different, not too long ago. When I moved to Milan. And when I started making good money.

Slick back hair, glasses, briefcase and expensive watch. Traveling business class. And eating at fancy restaurants.

Trying to look like a rich and successful business man.

But it never felt natural. I never felt comfortable. And it was never me. I always felt like a monkey dressed in clothes and clown shoes, forcing a behavior that doesn't come natural.

I was pretending to be enjoying the quiet in first class, while secretly being jealous of the people laughing in the back.

The comfort of the VIP table at the club, while secretly being jealous of the people dancing on the dancefloor.

The dead atmosphere at the fancy restaurant, while secretly wanting to go to the local restaurant with the plastic chairs.

It's funny. I thought that I had changed so much over the years.

But in some ways, I hadn't changed at all.

Full circle fallacy

I find myself trying, experiencing and learning so many things, only to end up in almost the same place I began.

For example, an ex-girlfriend of mine made me try a million skincare routines. In the end, I only kept using an Aloe Vera gel and a specific soap that clears my skin.

I also tried a million biohacking stuff. In the end, I just kept a Fitbit to track my sleep and heart rate, and gained the ability to intuitively track protein and calories.

I also tried a million different workout routines. Science based lifting, zone 2 and 3 cardio, interval training, etc. In the end, I ended up with

powerlifting and boxing, which I already loved, because it covers most bases and they're fun, so I stay consistent.

I also tried a million different diets. Vegetarian, Keto, fasting and a million supplements. In the end, I ended up with a few supplements and a few recipes for a boring balanced diet that I enjoy.

I also tried a million different types of clothes and styles. In the end, I ended up wearing the simplest clothes again, but from a specific Japanese brand that I loved the quality and fabric.

I also tried a million different things with CyberLeads. Yet over the years, the only thing I've actually added and kept is the service.

And so on and so forth. I go on a cycle of experimentation, go completely overboard, and eventually keep 1 or 2 little things that are actually worth keeping. While discarding all of the rest.

Sometimes it feels like I've come full circle and I've wasted my time. But if I look closely enough, I see that it wasn't a perfect circle.

It kinda reminds me of the Shotgun to Sniper strategy.

Part 2: Exploring

A few years ago, when I first had this dream of traveling the world, a friend of mine challenged my decision.

"Alex.. no matter where you go, you will always be yourself. You cannot run away from yourself or your problems."

"Ok, maybe you're right. But I'm not running away from any problems, if that changes anything."

"Right... sure... ok... what are you looking for then... You must be looking for something..."

Our conversation went round in circles. And on the way back home, I kept replaying it in my head. Until, it hit me.

"I am not looking for something. I am looking for everything."

I had read it in a book. But now I understood it.

Changing chapters

One of my favorite feelings in the world is being at the airport.

Looking forward to a new country. And a new chapter.

New characters. New language. New customs and rules. New food. And hopefully new memories you'll keep for a lifetime.

You go out and eat alone at a restaurant. Start feeling the vibe of the city. And start exploring.

No one knows you here. And anything is possible. You feel alive.

It feels like some kind of ancient biological reward system, deep inside your body, is being set on fire.

At 8, it was walking with my friends across the beach, climbing rocks and collecting sticks.

At 14, it was pulling all nighters at the internet cafe with my friends, while taking breaks to do graffiti all around the city.

At 18, it was going on road trips with my friends, going to another city and sleeping in our friend's van.

Now, I get that feeling in airports, ports and train stations. Getting ready for a whole new country and adventure.

Adventure

From the very beginning, traveling is an adventure.

Planes are magical. You are literally sitting on a bus with wings.

Trains are hypnotic. The world is sliding past your window.

And boats feel ancient. It's how we traveled for thousands of years.

Traveling is also spiritual. Thinking of your death is part of the experience. Even if it's just for a split second.

When the boat rocks a little more than you thought it would. When another train passes from the opposite side and you weren't expecting it. Or when the plane's wheels slam and bounce off the ground landing.

In that split second, you realize how much you love breathing. Everything else is stupid. Everything can wait for a second.

Finally, things going wrong is part of the experience. Losing your flight. The hotel not being like it was in the photos. Falling in love with the place and never going to the other places you had in mind. Or not liking anything and wanting to go back home.

You have to expect the unexpected.

Cities, mountains and islands

Big cities like New York, London and Paris inspire me.

Skyscrapers. Giant screens. Protests. Movement. Noise. Flyers. Music.

The biggest shows. The biggest businesses. The most famous people. Dead or alive. They all lived and made it here.

Walking around these cities, everything feels so big. I stand in front of a skyscraper and look up. The little ant inside me wants to pump it's chest out, raise it's voice and start thinking big too.

"I can take over the world too. Yes. Of course I can."

On the other hand, being in nature has the opposite effect.

Hiking on a mountain with an amazing stick I found, that is like a spear, thinking of taking it home with me. Or lying down on the beach, sipping on a coconut, listening to the waves and cicadas.

"I have everything. Who cares about taking over the world."

Some places feel familiar and like home. I walk on the streets and it feels like I'm walking in my living room in my slippers. Talking to everyone and making friends.

Other places feel completely alien. I walk carefully, analyzing everyone and everything around me like I'm on a different planet. I'm completely alone with my thoughts and talk to no one.

No perfect place

I honestly believe there is no perfect place.

All places can be paradise. And all places can be hell.

Big cities inspire me. But they also make me feel broke and wanting to join the rat race again.

Nature and tropical places relax me and make me feel enough. But I also feel bored after a while, itching for a challenge.

Places I felt comfortable in and can communicate with others, are always a great time. But they also didn't change me that much.

And places where I couldn't talk to anyone or experienced culture shock, stressed me out in the moment. But looking back, they changed my perspective on the world forever.

Finally, sometimes I'm just lucky when I visit a place. Make good friends, weather is great, and everything goes smoothly.

Other times I am unlucky. My house sucks, I have cockroaches in my bed or loud neighbors playing music until 5am. I don't meet anyone. And the weather sucks.

Anecdotes

Actually, that's why I try to never recommend places. I only did it a couple of times and once I really regretted it.

A friend of mine asked me where I think he should go. Without hesitation I told him about a city in Spain.

I had stayed there for a few months the previous year. I was lucky enough to make good friends. Lived by the beach. The weather was fantastic. Dated a local girl. Learned Spanish. And even in my personal life and business everything was going amazing.

Those months felt like a sweet dream I didn't want to wake up from. The ones you try to go to bed again to continue, but can't.

My friend went, but for him it was the opposite. The weather was bad. He didn't meet anyone interesting. Didn't find any good places to work from. And was stuck working all day from his hotel, waiting to leave.

I felt horrible for that. I told him confidently to move somewhere on the other side of the world. He did it. And regretted it.

I've noticed this many times talking with other travelers too.

Our experiences with places are extremely subjective and have to do with other elements of our visit, not the place itself.

For example, with good company, a tiny village in the mountains can be the coolest place in the world. And with bad company, New York can be boring. When you're in love, the most mediocre place can seem stunningly beautiful. And when you're in a bad mood, the most beautiful beach in the world can seem mediocre.

You can travel solo. With friends. Family. Or with a girlfriend. All very different experiences. None better than the other.

When you're solo, you make new friends. When you're with friends, you laugh all day. When you're with family, you have deep

conversations. And when you're with your girlfriend, you become romantic.

We also tend to generalize.

For example, to me, Cypriot people are the salt of the earth. The friendliest people I've met. Whereas my best friend had 3-4 negative interactions with Cypriots and thinks they are rude.

Understanding your country

The more I traveled, the more I understood my own country.

I remember when I first moved to Italy and started having chatting with my flat mates. We would end up comparing our countries.

We found so many things that were similar. And we found so many things that were different.

For example, we both studied Latin and Greek in school. But we focused on Classical Greece, Hellenistic Period and Byzantium. While they focused on the Roman Empire and the Renaissance.

We both had religious grandparents. In Greece, with giant crucifixes, showing Jesus on the cross, on the walls. In Italy with photos of the different Popes all around the house. And we both lived with our families for life. Grandparents on the bottom floor, parents in the middle, and children move to the top floor when they become adults.

And we both have houses with balconies. But Greek balconies are massive and people literally live on them in the summer. They bring out tables, inflatable pools for the kids, barbeque sets and the large TV from the living room to watch football. Italian balconies are tiny, just big enough to stand up and hang out the clothes to dry. Here you can hear the football playing in the living room.

The craziest thing about this is that when you return to your country, you get to experience reverse culture shock.

You return to your country and see it like a foreigner does.

Being free

Finally, I think traveling helps you be free.

There is no more societal expectations or social cost to your behavior. No one knows you. And no one cares about you.

You also tend to focus on yourself, since you don't know anyone and don't even understand what people are saying.

You don't judge anyone. And no one judges you.

Yes. You are a guest in someone's country. And similarly to when you're a guest at someone's house, you have to respect their rules.

But beyond that, you are free.

This is probably my favorite part of traveling.

Rooftop conversations

One evening, I went to a rooftop social event, to meet people.

At some point, I heard two guys next to me talking about software, AI and business. Before they had the chance to include me in the conversation, I quickly left to a different table.

It kinda surprised me. Not too long ago, I would include myself in. I

would be in my element.

To be honest, I was incapable of holding a conversation that wasn't about business or money. And couldn't wait to become successful and tell everyone about my business and my internet-famous status.

But in this moment, it was the last thing I wanted to talk about.

It was actually a little anticlimactic. All these years of building a business. All these years of imaginary conversations in my head. Moving my arms around, explaining in detail all the cool things I have built. Everyone listening at the edge of their seat, eyes sparkling, smiling, and admiring me. Me pretending I don't notice.

And now that it was time to actually do it, I never talked about business. Or say that I run a tech business and switch the subject. Or just get up and leave.

Maybe I should add it to the list of forbidden subjects. Alongside politics, religion and gossip.

But why? Am I not obsessed anymore? Am I losing my edge? Or is all this business stuff actually boring once you've solved it?

Sometimes I wonder if this will be my downfall.

Boring business, exciting life

I actually love this setup. Boring business. Exciting life.

I prefer working 2 hours per day, on my boring business, making a ton of money and enjoying my life, rather than the opposite.

I know this because I've done it. Running cool projects like Epilepsy Blocker, making no money and having no free time.

In a way, it all looks similar anyway. You do marketing, sales, product, accounting, hiring and managing a team.

As long as I can attach a mission to it, and I can keep seeing some progress over time, I can keep doing it forever.

The same way I can bench, squat, press and deadlift forever, as long as I can add even 1kg on the bar, every so often.

What's interesting is that the main charity I support is boring too. They provide bednets to people, to prevent Malaria. That's it.

But they are the best in the world at it, for many reasons. And they have prevented millions of deaths over the decades.

They are one of the most cost effective charities in the world, statistically preventing one death, usually a child's, for every \$5,000 spent.

That inspires me.

Part 3: Disconnecting

I'm in the middle of nowhere. Somewhere in the mountains in Asia.

Trying to order food at a tiny local family restaurant. Using a lot of eye contact, smiling, nodding and pantomime.

The food comes wrong. But it doesn't matter.

I look around and realize I'm the only foreigner here. Everything is so different from the Mediterranean I grew up in.

Every time there is a pause, I think of how lucky I am. I am grateful for this life and to be breathing. I feel my heart bubbling and my eyes getting watery.

Then I grab my phone and check social media.

A night run

A few months ago, I was on a night run.

I was running with my phone in one hand, my earphone case in the other, and my earphones in my ears.

I was listening to a podcast. I think it was about business. And I think it was about hiring and managing a team.

After getting lost once on a run in a forrest in Germany, I decided to always have my phone with me. But now that had transformed into me always listening to something when I'm on a walk or a run.

I remember I used to love running in silence. I would wait to get high on oxygen. Then wait for the second wind to kick in. And finally start

sorting out all of the thoughts in my head.

I would solve all of my business and personal problems during those runs. It was kinda like tidying my room. But for my mind.

Lately I've been doing the exact opposite. Adding even more thoughts and information to my mind instead.

A night in Bangkok

I remember another night, lying down in a dark room before going to bed, scrolling through videos on my phone.

I stumbled upon a video of a guy traveling the world, training Muay Thai, making new friends, going out and having fun, and dating women. He was living his best life. And was currently in Bangkok, Thailand.

I felt horrible watching that video. I wanted to rethink all of my life in that moment. I was afraid I was doing everything wrong.

I put my phone down and started looking around the dark room, questioning everything and feeling like I'm wasting my life.

"Wait a minute.. I'm also traveling the world.. Actually, I'm also in Bangkok right now.. I'm training Muay Thai.. I've made friends.. And sleeping right next to me is a beautiful woman I met here and dating..

I'm doing exactly what this guy is showing.. Why do I feel so bad watching this?"

The end of the world

Finally, when I follow the news too closely I find myself worrying that the world is about to end. Literally.

The US Empire is about to crumble. The world financial system is on the brink of collapse. Some new technology is going to make my business obsolete. My stocks are about to crash. And World War 3 is about to happen. All at the same time.

On those days, I try to leave my phone at home and go for a walk.

It's funny. When I was young, I used our family computer to escape the physical world. But the computer was like furniture in the living room. When I logged off, it was over.

Now I'm carrying that computer in my pocket at all times.

Back then, logging on to the computer and accessing the internet was an escape from reality. Today, leaving my phone at home and going on a walk is an escape from the internet.

The lines have become so blurry that sometimes I wonder which world is real and which isn't.

"Am I the person I am online? Or am I the person I am in real life?"

Millions have seen my work and interacted with me online. Yet only a few people know me or interact with me in real life.

Am I the person millions of people think I am? Or am I the person the cashier at the coffee shop, my family and friends think I am?"

Plato's cave

The more I think about it, the more obvious the answer becomes. Everything looks and feels real online, but almost nothing is.

Fake news. Fake videos. Fake accounts. Fake comments.

Fake science. Most of the things I read online are either click-bait, false, or exaggerated. The basics are well known that they don't get clicks anymore, so they have to come up with new things.

Fake fitness advice. Fake business advice. Fake photoshopped bodies. Fake revenue numbers. It feels like everyone is a 20 year old millionaire with abs, traveling the world. But just have a look around you when you walk outside.

Fake learning and fake productivity. I was trying to learn Italian through apps for months. Then I sat down, learned the most common 1000 words and practiced with my friends and Italian girlfriend. I was fluent and could hold a 2h conversation about life inside 3 months.

Fake flirting. I felt like I was exploring my options through dating apps, but it was a mirage. A few years ago, when I was in Colombia, I deleted all dating apps. Not because they are beneath me, but because they were the number one way they kidnapped, robbed or killed you. Ironically, it was the best thing I ever did for my dating life.

Fake minimalism. I don't own much. Yet I have a minimalistically designed phone with 100+ apps, consuming content non stop.

Fake ownership. I don't own anything. My ebooks are on the cloud. All my memories and photos are on a server I don't own. And all of my assets are literally numbers on a screen, not land or bricks.

Fake connections. I feel connected to everyone, but I don't actually talk to them or do anything with them.

Sometimes I feel like it's all fake. It's a great supplement to the real world. It's awesome that we have it. But it's definitely not a substitute. How could it be. It's so obvious.

My ancestors fought, danced and ate meals together all around a

fire. I'm eating alone, in the dark, staring at a glowing rectangle.

Digital Psychosis

Recently, through a random conversation, my brother ended up telling me that one of his friends came up with his own mathematical theory.

It sounded cool, but he tried explaining it to me and couldn't. So he called his friend so I could talk to him.

His friend was young and sounded smart. But at some point I started becoming skeptical. He was arguing that by using specific numbers, he could explain everything about the whole universe.

I asked him if he had taken his theory to a professor, mathematician, or even posted it on a science forum online.

He said no, he didn't want others to steal his idea. And that he was only talking to AI. But it had assured him multiple times that everything he was saying was correct.

I kinda checked out after that moment. And told him to take it to a professor, mathematician or friend.

I think he really believed that he had solved all the mysteries of the universe. Maybe he believed he would win a Nobel Prize too.

I know this because I'm a dreamer too. I also get drunk and high on my dreams. And I also talk to AI.

Whenever I want to feel good about myself, I just share some of my work or thoughts with AI. Depending on what I share, I am the second coming of Steve Jobs, Miyamoto Musashi or Fyodor Dostoevsky.

I've seen many travelers, that are completely alone and online for years, become insanely excentric and weird, because they are confirming all their beliefs through echo chambers online, sycophantic AI, superficial friends who won't press them, or strangers in their comments online, many of who are probably bots.

And it's not just travelers. It's also just people living alone for years without real friends or family to observe their behavior. Successful people surrounded by yes men. Or people that are not in contact with the elements of nature or the free market, that don't care about you and always gives you real feedback.

I'm also worried about this for myself.

Library of Babel

A couple of years ago, I hired an online personal trainer. It was a friend of mine from school.

I had no idea what to eat. How to train. And what to track. And it wasn't because of lack of information, but because there was too much.

I used to think that the more information I have, the better. But more and more, I have started to realize that knowledge is subtractive.

Every time I started to do something, an expert would pop out and tell me to do the exact opposite.

All I wanted was someone to tell me.

"Listen, these are the only 3 things that matter. Everything else is either bullshit, or overstated, or applies to elite athletes."

When I was young, I felt so lucky that I had the internet. If I was born just one generation earlier, I thought it would have been the

equivalent of being born into the dark ages.

But, to be honest, if I was born again, I would rather grow up in a house with a couple of shelves of vetted books and masterpieces, than in a house full of screens and unlimited, unvetted information.

Disconnecting

I threw my airpods in the trash. Stopped following the news. Downgraded my phone. And deleted everything from it, apart from navigation, messaging and calling.

I never missed anything. And I never felt calmer.

I had done something similar in the past.

A few years ago I deleted YouTube from my phone and blocked it on my computer. It was the best thing I've ever done for my productivity.

My new phone's camera wasn't that good either. So I also stopped stressing about capturing moments. I was never going to watch that 7 minute firework video, anyway. I could just relax and enjoy it.

We all know this, the best moments are never caught on camera.

After decades of friendship, amazing memories, funny stories and crazy nights out, me and my best friend have a handful of photos together.

Most of them are blurry.

Part 4: Reading

I'm on the plane. Reading a book.

I take a look around. Literally everyone is on their phone, working, watching a movie or listening to something on their headphones.

The scene reminds me of a dystopian movie. And I secretly feel better than everyone else.

However, a few minutes later, I stretch my legs and back. While rotating and facing the back of the plane, I see an old lady and a young man, talking about something and laughing hysterically.

It made me wonder.

"Is reading a book really that much better than scrolling through videos and listening to podcasts? It's still a passive activity, still disconnected from the world, and it's slower and less efficient."

Books

Initially, I wouldn't accept it. Books could not be like scrolling.

My immediate knee jerk reaction was to start listing all of the arguments I could find for books.

For example, that effort is a filter. Instead of consuming something that took someone a few minutes to produce, you are consuming something that took someone months, years or decades to produce.

Or that books tend to be more pure. Usually, the marketing and selling has ended by the time you have bought and opened the

book.

Or that books are far more intentional. Instead of being fed random things, you select the topic and person you want to learn from.

Or that reading is less passive. Reading takes effort, and you highlight, take notes, and come up with your own realizations.

Or that books have more range. Instead of reading the thoughts of people living today, you read the thoughts of the greatest minds of the past three thousand years.

Or that books stay with you. Somehow, I remember things from books I read decades ago. But I don't remember almost anything from the countless videos, news articles and tweets I have consumed.

Or, finally, that books can change your life. I used to hate the fact that some books repeat the same 3 ideas again and again. But now I think it may be a feature, not a bug. Reading, even a single idea, again and again, slowly, with your finger tracking the line, through different examples and different angles, highlighting different things you find interesting and taking notes, can engrave it deeply in your brain. Even a single strong idea can literally change your life.

So yes. Books are great. And they have taught me a lot.

But, at the same time, I don't want to pretend that they are perfect.

Just because an idea is in a book, it doesn't mean it's correct or true. Even if it's in a best selling book or a famous author.

So books can be a huge waste of time. Or worse, they can implant the wrong idea in your mind.

I never thought I would ever say this, but I don't think that books are real life either.

Being interviewed at a party

I remember reading a book, back in university.

It said that the best way to be interesting, is to be interested.

So you ask the other person questions. Mention their first name many times. And make it all about them. Then they are destined to like you.

It sounded perfect. And I was convinced. I still remember it.

The funny thing is that I can tell when someone has read that book. They mention my name 10 times in a 10 minute conversation. Ask me back to back questions about my life. And deflect any questions I ask them to turn the conversation back to me.

Obviously, it's flattering. And it works. But only to an extent. The reality is I don't want to be interviewed. And I'm never going to open up and have a deep conversation like this.

Sometimes, during those conversations, all I want is to see the other person's eyes sparkle, kick their chair back, stand up, start moving their hands around and go on a long rant. Talk about something they deeply care about. See some passion in them and vulnerability.

I think humans love symmetry. Even in conversation. If one person peels one layer of the onion, the other will want to as well.

It's a delicate dance. You shouldn't trauma dump. But you shouldn't interview either.

A conversation with my father

My father has had a sauna in his house for the past 20 years. He's obsessed. We always have our most honest conversations there.

Not sure why. Maybe it's because we are both naked, sweating and uncomfortable. Or maybe it's because it's the only place we get to spend time together, just the two of us.

Recently, I gathered the courage to tell him about something I did, expecting him to tell me how stupid I am.

"You remember my ex-girlfriend, right? Well, I recently paid off all of her student loans because I had promised it to her and to myself, while we were still together. Tens of thousands of dollars."

"Oh haha, that's funny. I did the exact same for my girlfriend when I was around your age."

"Seriously. What the fuck. Why did you never tell me?"

"Why would I?"

A bookstore in London

A few years ago, when I first started traveling, I went to a bookstore in London and bought 3 books about it.

The first one was 10 years old. The second one 100 years old. And the third one 3,000 years old.

I thought the modern book would be the best. After all, it would know all about remote work, social media and the latest and greatest places to visit. Then the 100 year old. And I thought I would probably never read or finish the oldest one.

But it was actually the exact opposite.

The first book was written by a life coach that was telling me what to think and how to live my life. And the book was basically a collection of case studies from their clients.

I couldn't even finish it.

The second book was written by an American explorer that was born in 1900 and died in 1939 while crossing the Pacific on a tiny raft. This book takes place when he was 26. He sailed across the Mediterranean and simply shares little moments from his adventures.

I loved this book. It's all underlined and full of notes, sitting on the living room table at my mother's house right now.

And the third book was the Odyssey. Changed my life.

Lindy

Somehow, the older the book, the more I trust it. But not because older books are automatically special in any way.

Terrible books existed in the ancient world too.

Me and my friend try to keep alive the Ancient Roman tradition of buying each other terrible books as a prank.

Usually modern self help books, like "how to become a millionaire in 90 days" or "become the automatic badass".

The irony is that I used to devour these books. And, god I hope not, I might be writing one right now.

So yeah, it's not that old books are suddenly magical. Terrible books existed in Ancient Rome too.

But because of a very simple reason.

If something has survived the test of time, the critique of scholars, and people have cared enough to share it, copy it, print it, translate it, and continue reading it for hundreds or even thousands of years, maybe there is a reason for that.

Also, there is something cool about reading old books.

First of all, it feels like time traveling. Secondly, people from a different time are more likely to have different ideas to you.

And, finally, for some reason, there is something majestic, mysterious and hypnotic about the deep past.

Even the oldest written story we have, The Epic of Gilgamesh, from Ancient Mesopotamia 4,000 years ago, opens up by talking about the past.

Specifically, here are the first words of human literature.

*"In those days, in those distant days...
In those nights, in those ancient nights...
In those years, in those distant years..."*

Intellectual fireworks

I realized something while writing these little stupid books.

That it's easy to support any argument I want with words and make it sound smart. Draw a cool analogy to nature, life or another field. And then start generalizing, moralizing and teaching.

But that doesn't mean the idea is correct.

For example, I was decorating everything I said with frameworks, principles, analogies, laws and philosophers.

Things sounded correct. And I sounded really smart.

For example, instead of simply showing you how constraints helped me move faster, I talked about Parkinson's Law.

Instead of simply showing you how chasing extremes has never worked out for me, I was talking about Aristotle's Sophrosene, The Buddha's Middle Way and Pareto's 80/20 Principle.

And instead of simply showing you how it was a million times easier to change my beliefs than my actions, and that it might be the same for others, I talked about Okham's Razor, Incentives and Skin In The Game.

Confirmation bias. Resulting bias. Survivorship bias. Rationalism. Empiricism. Price's Law. Law of Diminishing Returns.

Cool analogies. I was comparing scaling a business to physics, where depending on the size, you have different laws for different scales. Quantum physics for the very small, Newton's laws for the medium sized, and Einstein's relativity for the very big.

Or comparing scaling a business to civilization, where depending on the size, the codes of behavior change. Explain how the West adapted the Homeric virtues, into the Greek virtues, then to the Roman virtues, and finally to the Christian virtues. Explain how and why courage became reason, reason became duty, and duty became forgiveness.

Namedropping Socrates. Aristotle. Descartes. Spinoza. Musashi. Black Swans. Anti-fragility. Popper. Deutsch. Epistemology.

But the reality is that although I did all that, and all of it sounded smart and true, all those takes always aged like milk.

Everytime I took a break from my writing and came back to it, I found myself editing those things.

Either they were flat out wrong, overly simplistic, or I had changed my mind, or someone else, either 2,000 or 2 years ago, had already said it better than me.

After writing daily for almost a decade, I came to the very boring conclusion that the only things that are actually true, will always be true, and no one can ever take away from me, is reality itself.

Ironically, I try to write the way I wrote when I first started.

Just say what you did. And what happened.

Real morals are actions. Real intelligence is behavior. Real philosophy is scars. And real teaching is leading by example.

Everything else is just words.

Wabi Sabi

The beauty is that I am not an author. I am not a philosopher. I am not a fighter. I am not a teacher. And I am not Mother Theresa.

I can write horribly. Have typos. And contradict myself. Again and again. In thoughts. Words. And actions. I can make mistakes. Be afraid. Change my mind. And have fucked up thoughts.

Because the truth is that I'm a megalomaniac. I'm selfish. I'm petty. I get jealous. I'm afraid. And I'm a narcissist.

Once I realized that, I felt free. I will simply write what I did, said and thought, and what happened.

I am not here to teach. Moralize. Rationalize. Or generalize.

As a reader, I'm also sick of it. And not just in books. Everywhere.

Everyone telling me what to do. What to think. And how to live my life. The perfect morning routine. The perfect diet. The perfect workout. The perfect business model. The best countries to visit.

Do this. Do that. Shut the fuck up.

I believe that reading should be like hitting two rocks together, until you get a spark of your own. Not being spoon fed.

Maybe you find lessons in here that I don't see myself.

A grenade in my skull

I'll never forget the first time I went to India.

I changed my life. And if I tell you how, you will laugh. Not because it's funny. But because my realization was so trivial.

This was my entire realization...

"If you take the entire population of Europe.. and add it all together.. and then you take the entire population of the US.. and then you take the entire population of Canada.. and then you take all of the population of Australia.. and add it all together.. and then you take all of the population of Europe, the US, Canada and Australia.. and add them all together.. it's still less than one country, India.."

Maybe I knew this already, I'm not sure. I think I did. I always loved geography.

But reading about India's population back home was abstract. While being there, seeing the crowds of people, the density, the noise, the honks and cows crossing the road was an experience that hit me in

the chest and changed me forever. I don't know, maybe learning doesn't happen exclusively in the brain.

My whole life, I subconsciously felt the world was the West. Probably because that's where I grew up, and that's what I saw on TV and social media. But now I realized that the West was smaller than one country.

The world was way larger. And way different than I thought.

Throwing the books

Ironically, a book inspired me to stop reading.

It was that American explorer's book. Even though it was written 100 years ago, he was around my age at the time, and I feel every word of the opening chapter. Specifically this part.

"I rose from my deep chair and moved restlessly to the window. The ships were sailing down the Hudson and out to sea; and I envied every sailor that would wave farewell to the sky-line of New York.

Suddenly I became bored and impatient with everything I had and was: bored with people, bored with knowledge.

I realized I didn't want knowledge. I only wanted my senses to be passionately alive, and my imagination fearlessly far-reaching.

Adventure! Adventure! That was the escape. That was the remedy."

I closed the book and threw it on the sofa. In style, high up in the air, spinning. By the time it landed, I had goosebumps.

This is exactly what I've been feeling but cannot put into words.

I don't want any more knowledge. I don't want any more lectures.
And I don't want any more spoon feeding.

I want experiences. To feel, and to learn, by myself, through life.

Masterpieces

Books will always have a special place in my heart. And I know they'll be there, waiting for me, when I'm ready again.

Even in 1,000 years from now, I believe there will be a young girl in the countryside of England, reading Shakespeare's Hamlet.

A teenager in Tuscany, secretly drinking wine at his father's vineyard and trying to understand Dante's Inferno.

A beautiful elegant lady in Siberia, with her fur coat, sitting by the fire, turning page 994 of Tolstoy's War and Peace.

A sailor in Andalusia, reading Don Quixote, wondering if all the people he wants to impress and all the things he wants to achieve in his life are actually just windmills in his head.

A salaryman in Shanghai, reading The Art of War, thinking of how he could apply it to his own life, become successful, and win that girl.

And an old man in Cyprus, with a broken nose and a broken back, lying down on a beach, re-reading the Iliad for the 50th time.

This time to his youngest grandson, Hector. Who is not even listening because he's too busy playing with his puppy, Argos.

Part 5: Experiencing

I'm in London. For Christmas. With family.

All of us has flown in from all over the world.

And we are all together, exchanging presents.

And updating each other about our lives.

Capturing moments

While we were all together, my mother spoke to me.

"Alex. Tell us all about your trips. And show us some nice photographs!"

My grandma's eyes sparkled. She loves traveling.

"Oh, yes! I'd love to see some photographs, Alex!"

I grabbed my phone and started searching. After traveling for months, I only had a couple of photos that I could show.

A part of me felt proud. A smirk almost appeared on my face but I held it back. But, to be honest, another part of me felt sad.

I wished I had some nice photographs to look back on and help me remember all the things I saw and did.

A walk in Vietnam

When I was in Vietnam, a friend of mine lended me his camera, while we were out exploring another part of the city.

It was an old looking Japanese camera with a viewfinder. I loved it because you had to look at the object you're photographing through a little opening, instead of a screen.

I got lost during that time. I had never felt like this.

Every shadow was interesting. Every cat. Every old store that still said "Internet, Email and Fax Services" on the window. Every street vendor. Every scooter with a full family hanging off of it. And every old couple walking while holding hands.

I had been traveling for years. But this was the first time I was so immersed and in tune with the environment around me.

Different eyes

I went and bought a similar camera.

Started carrying it with me everywhere. And even went on walks just to take photos. Suddenly, everything seemed so interesting.

They call it the photographer's eye. But I think it's deeper.

It reminded me of an experience I've had a few times before. Every time I've discovered or fallen in love with a new subject or hobby.

Photographer's eye. Philosopher's eye. Writer's eye. Astronomer's eye. Scientist's eye. Historian's eye. It's all the same.

It's the kid's eye. It's seeing the world like a kid again.

I used to look at the Acropolis and shrug. Look at dinosaur bones and yawn. Stay indoors when there was a lunar eclipse. Run by the Roman market or the statue of Alexander the Great in my hometown and feel nothing, even though he grew up 40km away and I was literally named after him. I was completely numb.

But now everything felt magical again. And nothing made sense.

The fact that we exist. That we have 10 fingers. That we breath oxygen. That we make sounds from our mouths to communicate. That we are spinning in space. Or that we die.

That we believe in gods. Build temples. Write books. Light fires. Cook. Sing. Dance. Fight. Or look at the stars and wonder.

The magician's trick

Trying to understand the world and see it from a new perspective did not ruin the magic. It actually amplified it.

Knowing why the sun was red at sunset didn't make it less beautiful. Learning of the complexity of what was happening at a cosmic, atomic and subatomic level, made it feel even more beautiful.

Knowing that when I clicked on a link on my computer, information moved at lighting speeds through cables under the Atlantic Ocean (that sometimes get bitten by sharks) or through satellites floating in space (that sometimes get hit by tiny meteors), didn't make the internet feel less magical.

Knowing that epic poems were sang because it's easier to remember lyrics of songs than passages of text, didn't make them less epic.

Knowing that globalization existed thousands of years ago, in the form of Roman baths, libraries and gymnasiums instead of McDonald's and Coca Cola signs, doesn't make it less weird.

Knowing that the major civilizations like Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Greece and Rome were mainly the result of having superior geographical advantage for their time, aka being at the right place at the right time, didn't make them less impressive.

Knowing that the mama bird protects the nest and her eggs because it's encoded in her DNA, and not because society or her own moral reasoning told her, didn't make it any less heartwarming.

And knowing that culture seems weird because it's the collective work of many generations of people that lived hundreds or even thousands of years before me, didn't make it less precious.

The little crab

I always try to learn the language everywhere I go.

I believe a lot of the culture is carried within the language and the humour. For example, me and my mom always make inside jokes about Greece. But it's always in Greek. And they can't be translated.

I also believe that when you talk in someone's native tongue, you are talking to the child within them. The little crab, inside the hard and impressive exoskeleton they have built over the years.

Sometimes when I talk to people I try to remind myself that we are all kids that grew up. Even old people.

Somehow, you can see the kid through their eyes. That old man was a kid. Someone's son. Someone's dad. And someone's brother.

I think the ultimate level of this is your childhood friends. They can pierce through your armor. They look through your eyes and don't care what you have achieved. They see the little Alex they played football and went on endless bike rides with.

They see the little crab. And always will.

You somehow feel calmer around those people. Even though you are completely vulnerable.

I think that's what true confidence is. Being ok with opening a little window and letting people see the little crab.

The little crab can smile and wave.

Non verbal communication

At the same time, there is a language we all know already.

Smiling. Nodding. Eye contact. Hand gestures. Touch.

The flicking of the hair. The licking of the lips. The pumping of the chest. The swinging of the arms. Blushing. Peoples reaction to puppies. To someone's funny accent. To the sound of a little fart.

Reciprocity. You ask for a cigarette. Five minutes later, you come back with a Coca Cola to thank them. Then they force you to take another 5 cigarettes, no matter what you say. Then you start chatting.

And sometimes it's about saying nothing. I remember lifting weights with a 60 year old jacked chinese man and not exchanging a single word. Almost every day, for months. Just nods and first bumps. Loading and unloading the weights. He was my friend with no name.

Even in relationships. I have found myself expressing love mainly through touch, sharing food, and the tiniest acts of service. Like going to have a shower and seeing toothpaste already on your toothbrush.

Back in my hometown

I will never forget when I went back to my hometown, after traveling for many years and having lived in many countries.

In my mind, I felt like a completely different person. After all, I had traveled the world, achieved my dreams and experienced so much.

But, ironically, something extremely humbling happened. A few weeks later, I was my old self again. I was back.

I was waking up late. Became anti-social. Lost my drive and all my momentum. Messed up my routine. And felt sad.

It was like nothing ever happened.

Was it all a dream?

I realized that I hadn't changed. My environment had.

The reason I felt I had changed so much in the last few years was because my environment was constantly changing around me.

But now that I was returning to my old environment, I was starting to revert to my old self again.

For sure I have a baseline character. For sure I have a baseline personality. For sure I have a baseline happiness.

And for sure I can change. But not as much as I thought.

You know that feeling on the train, when you're wondering if the earth is stable and you are moving through it, or if the train is stable and the world is moving past your window?

That's how it felt. My perspective was the wrong way round.

1000 faces

The reality is that I am extremely influenced by my environment.

Whether it's the weather and nature around me. My house. My routine. The people. And even my own body's chemistry, which you could argue is the most intimate environment you live in.

I am different when it's sunny. And I am different when it rains. I am different in a big city. And I am different on the beach.

I am different when I talk in Greek. Different I am when I talk in Spanish or Italian. And I am different when I talk in English.

I am different when I haven't worked out in 2 weeks, eat like shit, drink too many coffees and sleep badly. And I am different when I work out every day, eat healthy, sleep well and socialize.

I am different living in a tiny dark apartment in the dirty part of the city. And I am different living in a bright house by the sea.

I am different when I walk slowly on the beach to commute to my cafe to work. And different when I have to drive around Athens.

I am different when I work all day at a job I don't like. And I'm different when I work for 2 hours per day on my own business.

I was depressed when I was on acne pills, until my mother saved me by forcing me to stop. No matter how much I tried to exercise.

I am different after a few weeks of living with my parents and sleeping in my teenage bedroom. And I'm different when I'm solo traveling the world.

I'm not sure it's exactly the same for everyone and for everything.

For example, my brother and my best friend are extremely extroverted, in almost any environment. I swing from introvert to extrovert depending on my environment and chemistry.

On the flip side, I am disciplined and can work in almost any environment. Whereas my best friend and brother swing from lazy to disciplined depending on their environment and chemistry.

But I think that by definition, most people, for most things, are somewhere in the middle.

So they fluctuate wildly depending on their environment.

Some days I walk around and avoid talking to everyone. My voice cannot even leave my throat.

Other days I cannot stop talking. I walk around, see people walking and think to myself.

"Wow.. look at all these people I can talk to."

Into the multiverse

I believe this is the power of traveling.

It forces a different environment upon you. So you are not just exploring the world. You are also exploring yourself.

How often do you meet new people in your hometown. Try a new food. A new hobby. Or even walk a slightly different route to go

home.

I never did. But when I traveled, I was forced to experience so many new things at once. And I was forced into a new world.

I saw weird things. Had interesting conversations. Had weird thoughts and realizations. And tried new things I would never try at home.

I even experienced different realities. In some places, I was exotic. In others, more boring than plain rice. In some places I experienced racism. On other places I was treated like royalty.

It felt like I had access to the buffet of life. That I was living life on fast forward. And that, for the first time in my adult life, time had finally slowed down.

It's ironic. When life went fast in the moment, it felt slow looking back, because I made many memories. And when life felt slow in the moment, it felt fast looking back, because I had made no memories.

Through experience, I quickly discovered which environments, routines, people and activities made me the happiest.

I lived in many different types of climates. I lived in many different types of cities. I lived in many different types of houses. I lived in many different types of neighborhoods. I tried many different types of hobbies and activities. I made many different types of friends. And dated many different women.

I think I know what makes me happy and what is a good fit for me. And not by guessing. But through experience.

Sure, a place or environment alone won't make you happy.

But it's a million times easier to be happy in a place that you love, with people that you love, doing things that you love.

And, again, money helps.

If you know what type of life or environment you want, it can help you create it. You can rent the house you want, in the neighborhood you want, own your time and do the things you want.

The fragrance of far away lands

The most beautiful thing about traveling is that you keep some of that magic fairy dust and fragrance of those far away places.

I remember when I was back in Greece, after years of being abroad.

Even though I was dressed exactly the same way as before, everyone was talking to me in English, thinking I'm foreign. And some were even saying that I have a tiny accent now.

I have no idea why, but I liked it. And took all of the above as compliments. It made me feel exotic in my own country.

However, a few weeks later, as I was walking full of confidence with my sunglasses on and my laptop in my hand, going to the cafe to work, a Greek grandpa stopped me and talked to me in perfect Greek.

"Are you the guy from the municipality, here to measure the electricity consumption of our building?"

The fragrance was fading. I called my sister to tell her and we laughed so hard that our ribs and cheeks hurt.

Part 6: Little moments

Recently, I was in Cyprus for a couple of months. As I was going to the supermarket, I bumped into a woman I knew from the cafe.

She was going to the beach with her friends, to have a barbeque, drink and swim until the morning.

She invited me. And I joined them.

A conversation on the beach

During the night, a few hours into our conversations around the fire, we slowly started breaking up into smaller and smaller groups.

I ended up talking with a beautiful Russian woman.

"So.. you said you travel the world.. tell me.. what is the craziest thing that has ever happened to you?"

I blanked. And I couldn't think of anything cool.

Eventually I spat out whatever came to my mind. Something about booking the wrong hotel and getting soaked in the rain.

It was a super lame story.

And I was almost blushing by the end, when she was expecting some crazy plot twist or turn of events, but there was none.

We never talked about traveling again for the rest of the night.

Questioning everything

Going home in the early hours of the morning, I replayed that conversation in my head.

"Seriously. Why don't I have any crazy stories from my travels?

I've never been robbed. I've never been in danger. I've never been arrested. I haven't even lost my luggage.

Am I doing everything wrong?

Should I have backpacked across North Africa, Latin America and South East Asia? Stayed at hostels with another 20 people? Visited uncontacted tribes, ran across deserts or sailed across the Atlantic?

I couldn't help but wonder.. maybe I've been doing this all wrong. Maybe I haven't been traveling, after all."

Little moments

Maybe I did do everything wrong. But the the more I thought about it, the more I relaxed.

Because it turns out I did have cool stories I could've said.

I could've said that I scuba dived with sharks with my sister. Sailed through a storm with my brother. Or sparred with Muay Thai champions.

Talk about running to stop traffic to save a man that crashed and thought was dead in my arms. Or about crazy nights out getting drunk.

But the reality is that those things did not come to mind for a reason. They sound way more cool and dramatic than they really were. And they don't reflect the real experience of traveling at all.

I think this is the reason I didn't like that travel video. In my experience, traveling feels very different.

It feels way slower. And way more subtle.

It's a collection of tiny moments. The ones that came to mind when I was asked that question on the beach. But felt too small and insignificant to say.

Like eating alone at a restaurant in a new country.

Listening to my neighbor practice Opera every day in Sicily.

Working at magnificent libraries in New York, Paris or London.

Running along the Thames, Seine or Hudson.

Having a cigarette, in the middle of the night, in the middle of nowhere, in the pouring rain, with an old stranger in Colombia.

Taking the night train, looking at the full moon, coconut trees, mountains and the moon's reflection on the water.

Long, fractal conversations, with new friends, on an empty rooftop in Vietnam. Conversations that take hours to unfold and develop.

Driving a little moped slowly, looking at the sunset and the sea, while a local girl is resting her chin on my shoulder. None us want to admit it, because this wasn't part of the plan, but we are falling in love.

Or being the passenger princess. A girl driving me around, pointing and showing me her world and trying to explain it to me.

Building your little routines. Making friends at the gym. Having your lucky table at the cafe. Building your social circle.

Seeing a pelecán family fly home every evening, at sunset, at exactly 6:15. The little kids and mothers in the front. The big strong dads in the back, the last to return from fishing.

Driving across the countryside and seeing families living with water buffalos, chickens, roosters, dogs and cats. In little wooden houses, always with the door open, eating all together.

Meeting the same stray dog every morning at the cafe, by the beach, resting it's little face on your shoe. You don't need to talk. Just breathe next to each other and share heat.

You wonder if you could live here forever.

Goat philosophers

I was having a conversation with my best friend recently. We were actually laughing and making fun of ourselves.

All these years of studying at university. All these philosophy books. All these conversations. All this writing and introspection.

Just to realize that the drunk uncle at the Balkan barbeque was right all along. The drunk uncle that grabs a white plastic chair and joins the teenager table to talk to you about life.

Amstel beer in one hand. Marlboro Reds in the other. Big beer belly. Long pinky nail to clean his ear and teeth.

He sits down. Lights his cigarrete. Takes a big puff. And slowly exhales, disappearing behind the smoke like the Oracle of Delphi...

"So... you guys dating any girls?"

Or the grandma that comes over has only one question for you.

"When are you going to find a good girl, to get married and start a family?"

Or the taxi driver that has heard it all and seen it all.

He never went to university. He never reads books. But he has learnt everything by listening to the radio, conversations and life.

Listening to other with an open mind. And hearing himself think out loud.

In Cairo. Palermo. Athens. Doesn't matter. He looks at you from the rear view mirror and warns you.

"Don't be in a rush to get married. Enjoy your youth."

All this advice sounds conflicting. But I think that's the point.

I remember a poem we used to make fun of with my family. It's in Greek, but the translated version goes something like this.

*"What perfect goats, these goats.
Born yesterday, and yet they already know,
with such precision all the goaty things.
As if they had studied goatness,
for an entire eternity."*

Goats already know all of the goat things.

Maybe humans already know all of the human things.

Maybe I am overthinking this.

The cost of traveling

No matter how much I love my life, there is something that I get to

experience often, that haunts me.

Seeing my parents grow old through video calls.

Sometimes, I can't help but notice them slowing down.

They have no idea that I'm thinking about it. They are just smiling and are happy to see me. And so am I.

So I don't say anything. And somehow that hurts even more.

It makes me wonder if I really want this lifestyle more than spending time with them.

Sure. I talk to them through video and we keep each other updated about the big things in our lives.

But that's not what I miss about them. I miss the little things.

Just being next to each other. Breathing next to each other.

Eating sunflower seeds with my dad, watching stupid movies and making fun of how unrealistic the acting and the plot is.

Going into town with my mother, reverting back to kid mode, having no idea where I am, where we are going, or what my name is.

Pretending to be arguing with my sister, but both of us secretly enjoying every moment of it.

Wrestling with my brother on the living room floor until our parents start screaming for us to stop before we destroy the house.

Going out to bars in Athens with my best friend and dancing non stop all night long, like peacocks that are trying to mate.

Watching TV and having tea, coffee and biscuits with my grandmother. Adding one or two pieces to her puzzle in the morning before leaving to go to the cafe. Or pushing her, in a wheelchair, to her favorite sunbed on the beach when she comes and visits me in

Cyprus. Always laughing, even though we talk about the same things, on repeat, because she forgets.

4,000 weeks

The reality is that it's not just my parents growing older.

It's all of us. It's me. My grandparents. My aunt. My uncle. My brother. My sister. My younger cousins. And you.

I read somewhere that the average life expectancy is 4,000 weeks.

I'm almost 30 now. Which is crazy to me. Sometimes I feel young. Other times I see an old photo of me and I'm shocked.

I remember when my grandmother once told me she had no idea where the years went and how she turned 80. I didn't believe her.

But now I do. I don't know if life goes by slowly. Or if life goes fast. If life is long. Or if life is short. But I know that it doesn't stop. There is no pause button.

I'm finding the first white hairs coming through. And even the first wrinkles. No one asked me. I don't like this. At all.

The only wrinkles I don't mind are the wrinkles around the eyes, that are supposed to be from smiling. I actually find those beautiful.

Some days I'm hopeful that I'll have the time to do everything I want to do. And die in peace, fully content and fulfilled.

But other days, I realize that I probably won't be able to do that. Not just due to lack of time, but also due to the fact that the arbitrary TODO list of life seems to constantly expand.

I know this from business. One of the most important meta skills in business is being ok with not finishing your TODOs.

Which sounds ironic. But it's true. Sometimes the most productive thing you can do is stop working and go to bed. Or even delete half of your TODO list to focus on the few important stuff.

Not because you are lazy. But because work never ends. And sometimes, tragically, the more you work, the more your TODO list grows.

I believe the same applies to life. Desires and goals never end. As long as you are alive, you will desire.

You have a finite life. And there are infinite things to do. So you cannot do everything, by definition.

Millions of lives

I'm trying to accept this.

That I am who I am. I did what I did. And I'll do what I'll do.

Even if it's not everything. Even if things don't go perfectly.

I used to believe that I am building the perfect life. I used to believe that everything in my life happened for a reason. And that I'm so lucky things happened exactly the way they did, because otherwise I wouldn't be who I am today.

But, to be honest, I find that belief extremely egocentric.

First of all, I don't think the universe cares about my love life, my business or my arbitrary goals. I believe that things just happen. Period. Not a specific reason.

I also don't believe that things couldn't have gone better and that I am the best possible version of myself.

I am just one version of myself.

I probably didn't make the maximum amount of money I could have. Maybe I would have made \$10M by now with a different business.

I probably didn't have the maximum amount of fun I could have. I could've gone backpacking at 18, sailed the world or lived in a van.

I probably didn't become the best fighter I could have. I could've had 100 fights and won small regional belts all around the world.

I probably didn't have the maximum amount of moments with my family. I could've stayed in my hometown and never leave.

I probably didn't have the maximum amount of impact to the world. I could've made dedicated myself completely to charity.

And that's ok. The point is not to maximize everything. Which, by definition, is impossible.

The point is to find one great career and business that can allow me to live comfortably. One great place that makes me feel warm inside to call home. One amazing routine that makes me a happy version of myself. And one beautiful soul to share my life with.

There are millions of possible different lives. And so many of them beautiful in different ways.

Some lives would've been better. Some of them would've been worse. And all of them prioritize something different.

Regardless of how things happened. Why things happened. Or if this is the best possible outcome.

The only thing that matters is if I am proud and happy with my current life right now. Do I love myself and do I love my life.

Which I do. More than I ever thought I could or would.

Every day, I thank the gods, universe, luck, and randomness, for blessing me with a beautiful and fulfilling life.

Appendix

For the first time in my life, I don't feel like I'm going anywhere.

But I'm also don't feel lost. Even though I don't have a clear compass and sense of direction.

It's a weird feeling I haven't felt before.

I'm not sure I like it.

Aesop's Fable

I don't want to give the impression that I am suddenly enlightened.

That I'm always in the moment, completely content with my life, enjoying every little moment and constantly smelling the roses.

I still get stressed. I still compare myself to others. I still feel like I'm running out of time and that I'm behind. And I still have the itch to start working harder than ever.

Some days I am a grasshopper. Sing all summer long and enjoy my life as much as possible.

But other days I am an ant. I want to work all day, achieve all I can achieve, and gather up as much money, status and fame as

possible.

Sisyphus

I also don't want to give the impression that just because I know what environment and lifestyle makes me happy, that it's easy to maintain and that I'm happy all the time.

My life is Sisyphian. I still fall off the horse. I still end up losing all momentum. And I still end up sometimes feeling depressed.

Even in my beautiful house by the sea.

It almost feels like a Greek tragedy. An endless task.

What's next?

Honestly? Not sure.

This is the first time in my life I'm not living in the future as much as I used to.

I still have the same goals. And I'm still working on my business.

But, other than that, I'm simply trying to enjoy the passage of time.

Time travel

Hey. This is Alex from the future writing this.

I decided to clean up and re-post my blog posts as free books.

Nothing changed. Even if I disagree with things I said back then.

Regardless of marketing or algorithms, the greatest books have always ended up in my hands through recommendations.

So if you you enjoyed them, you can do the following:

- Share them on X or LinkedIn
- Leave a review on Amazon
- And message me so we can have a chat

Or don't. It's ok.

Thank you for reading.

Wall of love

Thanks to everyone that has been reading for the past years.

- I just finished the mini book series by @alexwestco and it's awesome. He brings you to his startup journey, and go personal in every stage: from shouting in the void for 2 years, to désillusion, to finally making it. It's raw and honest. It feels like you're with him. Much better than most biographies made to be published. The books are free. Go read them!

@marc_louvion

- Got a long day ahead traveling back home so I got myself some nice books to read

@florinpop1705

- Finished all of them in one go. I could not stop. Oh, the pain!! Such an eye opener..

I am on my 3rd (failed) project in 6 months, but now I feel

@alexwestco saved me months, possibly years. thanks

@Andrei0Vlad

- The time is never right!!

@thepatwalls

- This is perfect!

@dvassallo

- That is the most inspirational piece of content I read. Bookmarking this for my future references

@tejas3732

- The most honest, powerful and inspiring thing I've read all year. Gives me so much hope to see that I can have a stable life without giving my life to a boring 9-5 desk job. Congratulations man.

@consolerod

- When I was a child I remember reading The Eternaut comic at night I was completely hooked up, waiting for the next night to read again and continue the story.

Yesterday I had the same feeling reading @alexwestco books and I woke up desperately to finish the sixth book.

Looking forward to the rest of the books

@AgustinVqz

- "Most advice is bullshit". I'm sold.

@martinrue

- Reading @alexwestco's third book and it's blowing my mind. His mini books aren't playbooks, but I've learned a ton from them. Really appreciate it.

@dzung_fz

- This is really a great read for aspiring indie hackers. Raw, authentic and super honest. I used to read @alexwestco blogs 4 years ago and this part feels super relatable to me.

Yeah, those cute little side projects.

@ShresthaBheart

- Just started reading Alex's books.

Finished the first 2 today.

So much value + it's FREE.

Thank you so much Alex!!

@HsanC_

- halfway through @alexwestco's book one, and i gotta say im surprised how brutally honest it is.

wish for more books to show the real mess of being an entrepreneur instead of handpicked highlights

@todorovskiognxn

- This is exactly what I needed. Great read.

@Renatello

- this feels like holding a mirror

this isn't some polished picture-perfect fairytale

just a raw, gritty, and accurate depiction of what figuring it out looks and feels like

reminds me that this shit is hard for everyone

@luisgnet

- Book 2 done, on to Book 3

but maybe I should get some work done first

Thanks for sharing all this knowledge Alex.

@lovish888

- I'm currently reading the books of @alexwestco and I had to laugh very loud in public at one part. A lesson every indiehacker/founder has to learn the hard way.

@TweetsOfSumit

- Feels illegal to read all these for free! Amazing stuff, zero BS, great work.

Already waiting for the last two books.

@mysancaktutan

- Been reading @alexwestco books and they are fire. so authentic and real, you feel like he's talking directly to you. Hella inspiring brother, keep going!

@MaximilianDrago

- On to book 3 @alexwestco

This speaks a lot as well to me. Humbling.

"The world is random and chaotic"

I can't go around and making sense of everything.

@cyphorous

- These words from the book 1 of @alexwestco hits different for the perfectionist I used to be.

Reading is a leverage for your actions.

Without action it's just a form of procrastination.

Damn, it's even a good sign, it means you're growing.

@kevin_miguet

- I am only fishing up the book 1 @alexwestco but I can see myself at the very beginning of this journey. Thanks for sharing, it gives me the strength to build and document as well

@YAVIIN

- Goated quote by @alexwestco.

"Someone holds a gun to your head: "You have to generate revenue online by the end of the week. If you don't, you're dead." Extreme.

But effective. All the pretend work goes out of the window.

@byteberserker

- "Life is chaotic. And you shouldn't try to change that. Embrace it's unpredictability and make it work for you. Not against you."

Please, never stop writing man.

Thank you very much for sharing
@luisetelo

- Exited to dive into @alexwestco's second book. I am a total newbie and I find it interesting to read his experience when starting out.

@lastFitStanding

- Yesterday went to the beach, brought the tablet with me to start reading N1, got so hooked, read until 50% of N5 haha

Thanks for such a nice write!

@rrmdp

- I'm reading the first one now.

Great writing and very honest. Love it!

@fisheryeah

- Just finished book 6, tight in time

@rasulkireev

- Loved the book - been reading your tweets for years now, and it was really interesting to hear the whole story. Can't wait for the next one :)

@scalingspencer

- Loved reading this, excited for the next one. Remember reading your blogs from when you were working in Milan. Inspired me to pursue my own thing and very happy I did

@alexandraeswan

- I read this in one sitting thanks for sharing man.

It is really eye opening the amount of struggle that is required to building something. Thank you for being this honest.

@JacobSchwarz963

- Great work, and great thoughts

@jdnoc

- Can't wait for book 2!

@GlitchPhoton

- Hey Alex, anxiously awaiting the next drop. Didn't see it yesterday. Any idea when we might expect it?

@KevinSidwar

- "It's easier to become 10x luckier by increasing your exposure, than it is to become 10x better at understanding and predicting the world." Love this, man.

@colestriler

- great read. you write very concisely yet cover a lot of ideas. it also shows that you are building mental fortitude to handle anything. congrats!

@swyx

- Mate, at the end of your article "Two Years" I was like: This is so sad, but here comes the happy part about the sales...nothing. Great read. I'm literally in the exact same spot!

@rubenkenes

- "You can't make people buy. All you can do is keep them in your orbit by showing them what you do and staying top of mind." Love this from @alexwestco

@fredrivett

- Reviewing 300 applications for notJust Incubator, I saw many founders doing the same mistakes we all go through at the beginning. Just read the first book by @alexwestco, and this hits home

@VadimNotJustDev

- Just finished @alexwestco Book 3. Learning Through Scars - a raw, unfiltered journey of building a \$3K/month business without selling courses. No fluff, just real talk about failure, luck, and the grind. If you're tired of gurus and want a real story, this one's for you. Davide Agostini

- Amigos, this is my truth that I have been drowning in for the last five years. Alex's book are a must-read

@Amigov_AI

- Had to add @alexwestco as a case study in my upcoming Solopreneur Masterclass, among other incredible solopreneurs and small business owners we can all get inspiration from!

@flaviocopes

- I've never read a book in my life but I'm halfway on book 1. It's inspiring and makes me want to start a business.

@bel4dm

- Recently read @alexwestco's two Kindle books. Really is a great reminder that it may seem like everyone knows what they're doing... But we usually see only the successes, not the uncertainty, building + getting no traction, etc

You just gotta keep moving forward + building

@gavin_wiener

- Last Sunday evening downloaded all @alexwestco books by chance opened the number 6 and started to read it I couldn't stop until I finished it

such a nice, authentic and hooking reading a real not BS entrepreneurship story

Nice one Alex.

@rrmdp

- I'm getting a lot of motivation out of these. Seems like all of builder X is reading them right now Alex!

@martinrue

- It seems like everyone is reading them right now!

@MahdiEzz_code

Credits

Finally, special thanks to everyone that inspired and supported me, whether they know it or not.

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- Patrick and John Collison, thank you for building the tool that has allowed us all to make a living online. No joke, Stripe changed our lives. In awe of what you're building with Arc Institute. And huge fan of your podcast "Cheeky Pint".
- DHH, thank you for bringing common sense to the tech industry. Reminding us that you don't need to run a VC company and become a billionaire to be successful. And that you can have work life balance.
- Jason Fried, thank you for sharing your contrarian views regarding work. It's inspiring to see how ahead of the culture you were with remote work and SaaS. Your books are awesome too.
- Pat Walls (and Demi), thank you for replying to my emails back in 2021. Also for your awesome daily blog, which definitely inspired me to continue to write daily. Finally, thank you for showing us the power of focusing on one business, which you can adapt and evolve over time.
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journey. Also for sharing your authentic thoughts and taking a stance, even if it's not popular.

- Stamos Venios, thank you for inspiring me to start this journey and for teaching me that you learn by doing, not studying. Your story inspired me a lot. I've told you this directly, but it's true. You are one of the main reasons I'm here today.
- Sam Parr, thank you for sharing my little business with your audience. Even more importantly, thank you for always being nothing but kind and generous to me. Funnily enough, your show, "My First Million", helped me make my first million.
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- Marc Köhlbrugge, thank you for building WIP.chat. Seeing other successful makers public TODOs made me realize that everyone just builds things, fixes bugs and makes mistakes. Like me. This was actually one of my most important realizations. It was frame breaking.
- Danny Postma, thank you for showing us that even indie products can exit to a larger company. And that even after an exit, if you want it bad enough, you can go back to square one and try again and again until you succeed again.

- Jason Cohen, thank you for your amazing blog and talks. Probably the best business blog in the world. And for your talk on boutique bootstrapped businesses. Seriously, that talk helped me niche down, raise my prices and change my life.
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- Justin Jackson, thank you for your essays and podcasts regarding the importance of markets. You might not know it, but they were super impactful to me and helped me end up in the lead generation market, which helped me find CyberLeads and change my life.
- Josh Pigford, thank you for being one of the first people to show your complete list of failed products before your big success. I remember seeing the list and preparing mentally to go through the same. I built 19 failed products, then the 20th changed my life. Thank you.
- Nathan Barry, thank you for being one of the few people continuing to share revenue numbers after reaching millions in revenue. We have small businesses like myself doing that. We also have huge public companies doing that. It's great to have companies in the middle, like yours, do that too. Also, thank you for showing me the value of niching down and focusing on one segment of the market at a time. It really helped me grow CyberLeads and change my life.
- Ali Salah, thank you for being one of the OGs from 2018 and showing me that slow, consistent growth, in a saturated market, while focusing on product, can actually happen. This hasn't been my own experience and it's another example that anything and everything can work, there are no magic recipes.
- Michael Aubrey, thank you for being another story of hard work. Seeing you try for multiple years before finally achieving success is inspiring. Reminds me of my own journey.
- Reilly Chase, thank you for showing me that you can build a boring business, on top of an existing platform, and grow alongside it. Been inspiring to watch you grow over the years, build a team, a house and a life for yourself and your family.
- Rob Walling, thank you for your books and for your amazing podcast. I've listened to so many episodes over the years and there

is always something interesting to take from them, because you and your gueststalk from experience, not theory.

- Jack Butcher, Bilal Zaidi and Trung Phan, thank you for the awesome podcast, the great art and the funny memes you've all been sharing with us for the past many years.
- Nico Jeannen, thank you for showing us that building and exiting multiple little businesses is possible. Also for keeping it real and sharing the good and the bad. There aren't that many people that do that and it's inspiring to see.
- Marc Lou, thank you for setting a new standard on shipping fast. I thought I was prolific for shipping 20 products from 2018 to 2020, but you took it to a whole new level. Respect.
- Peter Askew, thank you for blurring the lines between boring and cool. Selling onions online is simultaneously one of the most boring and one of the coolest businesses in the world.
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- AJ from Carrd, thank you for showing us that you can build and grow a simple, elegant and useful product by yourself and make great money without charging high prices. Frame breaking.
- Alex Napier Holland, thank you for being real and having authentic thoughts and opinions. You are one of the very few non BS and non cringe people on my timeline.
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- Lim How Wey, thank you for sharing all of your knowledge around SEO. It was really helpful to me. And thank you for always being kind and supportive, I truly appreciate it.
- Arvid Kahl, thank you for sharing the story of exiting your SaaS business. It's been awesome to see you re-invent yourself and write your books.
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- Andrew Wilkinson, thank you for showing me that you can build insane wealth with boring businesses. Your essays and books are amazing. It's great to see your progress from being a freelancer, to running a small studio and being afraid to hire people, to managing hundreds of employees, to running a portfolio of companies, to finally going public. Insane.
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- Eneas Lari, for being my best friend in life.
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And to all the people that have supported me over the years or have shared my books. If I missed you, it's not on purpose.

Constantly updating this list.