

Book 12:

**Looking for
answers**

**(\$20,000/month,
year 7)**

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Not Business Advice

How I made a million from my personal projects

Book 12: Looking for answers

(\$20,000/month, year 7)

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Introduction

I'm looking at my charts.

They are all falling. Plummeting.

CyberLeads is dying. And I'm not sure why.

Why is this happening. I'm working harder than ever before.

Part 1: Searching for solutions

I'm on a call with Jonathan. It's been 3 hours already.

We've been having calls every day. And going through every number.

We should be able to find the solution to this problem.

After all, we've been tracking everything for years.

A complicated machine

Our meetings have not been very productive. We can't find anything in particular that is lacking. Out of 30+ metrics that we have been tracking for years, nothing stands out clearly.

So we've come up with a plan.

Let's improve everything and bring every single metric back to where it was when we were making \$50k/month.

If we can replicate the inputs of the machine when it was making \$50k/month, we should be able to replicate the outputs too. In other words, reach \$50k/month again.

At least, that is our theory.

Organizing everything

We separated our metrics into different categories.

Fulfillment. Sales. Marketing. And business.

For the actual business we had metrics like "new paying subscribers", "new clients", "revenue", "churn", "MRR", "ARR", "margins", etc

For marketing we had "traffic", "new free newsletter subscribers", "cold emails sent", "number of posts, views and traffic from Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google, Chat GPT, referrals", "conversion from each channel", etc

For sales we had "number of follow ups sent to hot leads", "meetings booked with potential clients", "meetings had", "clients signed", etc.

And for fulfillment we had "time to onboard", "time to first lead", "emails sent", "campaign reply rates", "leads per week", "pipeline value in millions", "pipeline funding in millions", etc.

We were excited. We got to work. And felt extremely productive.

Blinded by metrics

It's been months since we started working on these metrics. And we've been working harder than ever.

I'm checking Stripe. Revenue is still dropping. It's at \$25k/month now. It was \$50k/month just a few months ago.

That's scary. A 50% drop. Boom. Out of nowhere. Why.

Out of 30+ metrics, some have improved. Others have not. Some have stayed the same. Some have declined. And others have 5X'ed.

The problem is that we have no idea if the business is dying because of the metrics that haven't improved yet. If it's dying because we have to double down and improve our metrics even more. Or if it's not dying and we just have to wait for the results to kick in.

Historically, it took three months to see my marketing and product work result into revenue. Now it's been 4.

Our conversations have been going round in circles. For days. Until we both finally admitted it. We are lost. We are lost in the numbers.

We are tracking too much. And we are working on too many things.

Equation of business

I open a brand new file and name it "north star metrics".

Forget about average and median onboarding times. Forget about the average and median number of emails sent per week per client. And forget about the number of follow ups we send to hot leads.

Maybe we don't need them. We did just fine without these metrics for years. Actually, way better than we're doing now.

After tracking 30+ metrics for years, we came to the extremely boring conclusion that only 3 inputs mattered.

It wasn't average and median onboarding times. It wasn't number of posts on social media. And it wasn't even churn.

It was the average number of clients we sign each month. The average number of months they stay. And the average price they pay us.

In other words, how many customers do we get, how long do they stay, and how much do they pay us. So simple.

For years, I used to sign 4 new clients on average per month. They stayed for 4 months on average. And they paid me \$2k/month.

For that reason, CyberLeads plateaued at 4 clients X 4 months X \$2k = \$32k/month. And stayed there. Stuck. Forever.

Similarly, the newsletter was stuck at around \$10k/month. So, all together, \$42k/month or \$500k/year.

Because, after a while, the number of customers coming in was equal to the amount of customers leaving.

So my business hit an equilibrium.

This was mind blowing to me. Because I always somehow thought that things would compound just for staying in business.

But everything made sense now.

The reason why I was stuck for \$500k/year for years. And the reason I didn't break through that plateau.

Working backwards

This equation gave me clarity. And, frankly, a little bit of hope.

I used to fly blind. Either by tracking too little. Or by tracking too much. But now I could see just right.

So not only can I fix this mess. But maybe I can even reverse engineer the magical \$1M/year business I've been chasing forever.

After playing with the numbers for hours on end, I reached the conclusion that this was my most realistic shot.

I needed for clients to pay me \$3k/month, to sign 4 new clients per

month, and for them to stay for 5 months on average.

I called it the 3-4-5.

It seemed pretty realistic. I've charged people \$3k/month in the past without a problem. I've signed 4 clients in a month countless times. And I've had clients stay for 5 months many times too.

I just need to improve my systems enough to lift the averages up to this level. Increase my prices by \$1k/month. Sign 1 more client per month. And make them stay 1 month more.

Even if it's hard. Even if it's working on the wrong side of the 80/20 principle. It's worth it. Because it would double the business.

The service would reach \$60k/month. Because $\$3k \text{ per month} \times 4 \text{ clients per month} \times 5 \text{ months retention} = \$60k/\text{month}$.

If I could make another \$10k to \$20k from the newsletter and other offers, which I've done before, the dream would be complete.

Maybe I could reach the magical \$83k/month.

\$1M/year.

Deep research

However, there is a problem.

I can't focus on "signing more clients", "making them stay longer", or "making them pay more". They are too vague and mean nothing.

And I can't focus on those 30+ small individual metrics either. They are too specific and too many.

What I need is a middle ground. A few individual metrics that will

influence those 3 big levers. One metric per lever.

And after a ton of analysis and crunching numbers, I found them.

They weren't what I thought they would be. Not even close. And I felt happy about that. Because it made all my hard work seem worth it.

I felt like a scientist. Because I had clear winners. One golden metric for each of the 3 big levers.

The single metric that correlated the most with "more new clients" was "number of meetings with potential clients".

It wasn't traffic. And it wasn't impressions on Twitter either.

The single metric that correlated with "clients stay longer" was "number of leads forwarded to clients".

It wasn't deals closed. And it wasn't having lower prices either.

And as far as pricing goes, lower prices didn't mean clients stayed less. So I could freely charge \$3k/month.

Actually, it was the price that maximized LTV.

So the gameplan was simple.

I was going to flood Jonathan's calendar with meetings. I was going to maximize the number of leads we forward to clients. And I was going to charge people \$3k/month.

These 3 metrics should influence the 3 big inputs of the business.

And make the machine fly. At last.

Getting to work

I added "book a call" links everywhere. Upon signup for the free newsletter. Inside the weekly newsletter email. Inside the monthly list. Inside our cold email campaigns. And in the welcoming emails.

I offered free AI demos for Jonathan to blow their minds. Free introductions with other agency owners. And free consultations on how to run campaigns.

Within a couple of weeks, Jonathan's calendar was packed. We 5X'ed the number of meetings we were having.

For leads, I revived an old idea of mine. The agency network. I could link up and match agencies with complementary services and similar clients, in order to partner up.

I also created a new feature. The referral network. Everytime I got a new agency for my free newsletter, I asked them if they are looking to hire another agency. If yes, I would introduce them to my clients.

Within a month, we 5X'ed the number of leads we were forwarding to our clients.

Finally, for good measure, I started posting like a maniac on Twitter. I 5X'ed the number of posts I was publishing.

For the first time in months, I was sleeping properly again.

I was optimistic and confident.

My last fight

It felt good working only with a few variables. I had clarity.

I've always done better this way. It was the same with fighting.

My best fights were always without a fight camp. On a random Wednesday afternoon, after sparring, the coach would come by and ask us.

"We have fights on Saturday, who wants to fight?"

If I felt confident, I would raise my hand. I knew that all I had to do is not get injured, not get sick, and manage to run up and down a massive mountain hill in my neighborhood 3 times.

If I could do those, I knew I was ready.

On the flip side, my worst fights were always with a fight camp. I would try to focus on too many things at once and fuck up.

Try to peak correctly and overtrain. Try to focus on a specific element of my game and neglect others. Try to study my opponent and expect something different. Or spar too much and get hurt.

I would always fight injured, overtrained and stressed out of my mind.

I will never forget my last fight. My best and worst fight.

A pro fighter out of my gym pulled out of his fight with an injury. My coach asked if I wanted it instead. I was high on momentum from a back and forth war just a couple of weeks before, so I said yes.

My 8 week camp was tragic. I had to lose 8 kilos while training twice per day. I overtrained to the point I got rhabdomyolysis and my piss was brown. My back hurt again. I injured my rib in sparring. And even though I was training more than ever, I felt the least confident I had ever felt leading up to a fight.

Fast forward to the night before the fight, in our hotel room, my teammate is studying tape of his opponent.

His opponent had fought at Lumpinee stadium, the most famous Muay Thai stadium in the world. And many years later, at the time of

writing this book, he's currently competing in ONE Championship.

He recommended I also study my opponent. Even a little.

It was the last thing I wanted to do. Especially now. So I told him that I didn't even know who I was fighting. And that I didn't want to know either. It's better this way.

But what he said stuck with me. And lying down in bed at night, I couldn't help it. I googled the event and found my opponent.

Honestly, I wish I never did. Because it turns out I was fighting a world title holder. He had 18 pro fights. And knockouts.

I couldn't believe it. What the fuck am I doing here. And what the fuck am I doing fighting this guy.

I saw the first minute of his last fight. It was a title fight. He was murdering a guy with leg kicks.

Then I turned it off and tried to fall asleep.

The next day, backstage, warming up for the fight, I was terrified. I had the same internal dialog as I always do.

"Why the fuck am I doing this. I don't need to do this. How did my entire life end up in me being here. I am way smarter than this. This is my last fight. For real this time. I promise."

Luckily, as soon as I made the walk and stepped into the ring, the nerves disappeared. Everything went silent. And I was running on adrenaline.

Those 9 minutes felt like an eternity. Maybe a nightmare. But I felt no pain. I felt no nerves. And I was completely on autopilot.

The fight went the distance. I lost on points. And I even enjoyed it.

But it wasn't close. At all. I got my ass beat.

For the entire fight, I was getting hammered in the head and body, while waiting for his famous leg kicks. They never came. He only threw one in the third round. I checked it.

He hit me 300 times. I hit him 3 times. All of my body was in pain for weeks. It felt like I had been in a car crash.

After the fight was over, I felt betrayed by everyone. Myself. My training. My preparation. My coach. And my teammates. I felt like I was thrown to the wolves like a sacrificial lamb.

I asked my coach why he didn't tell me who I was fighting during camp.

"Because it wouldn't help you. The point is to fight brave and free, showing no respect for his credentials. Who gives a fuck about fake belts and records anyway. It's a fight. Anyone can win."

I didn't believe him. And at that moment, I realized that he didn't care about me one bit. I didn't want to see his face ever again.

When I got back home, I debated for a few days if I should double down on fighting or start building businesses.

I started building City Vibes.

Part 2: Looking for answers

I have to open Stripe and check my monthly revenue. But for the first time in years, I actually don't want to do it.

I check my monthly recurring revenue.

"\$20,184"

When I first hit \$20k/month a few years ago, I felt like the richest man in the world. Now I hate it.

It doesn't feel like \$20k/month anymore.

It feels like minus \$20k/month.

Doubting everything

At the same time, I still don't understand what's wrong.

I open the client report.

We are booking more meetings than ever. But we are not closing more than we used to. We are actually closing less.

We are forwarding more leads to clients than ever. But they are not staying more than they used to. They are actually staying less.

We're onboarding people faster. Bringing them their first lead faster. Sending more emails and improving the reply rates of their campaigns. Locking them in by building custom CRMs for them. And communicating with them more often, being proactive and presenting our work in a more premium way.

We're also following up with hot leads weekly, monthly and quarterly. Running cold email campaigns. Being active on every platform instead of just Twitter. Offering them free stuff to show up on a call with us. And even providing discounts and custom deals.

Yet everything is underperforming.

We never used to have to do these things in the past. The business was doing great, we were growing and had happy clients.

But now, for some weird reason I don't understand, we have to do all these things just to stay flat.

I'm not sure why this is happening. Or if this is normal.

But this is my reality.

Brutal conversation with myself

I check Jonathan's calendar. It's packed.

This is so weird. Everything looks great. But nothing is working.

Is it my team's fault?

Maybe Jonathan isn't as good at closing as I thought. Maybe Rayvin isn't as good at writing campaigns as I thought. Maybe Joel isn't as good at client communication as I thought. And maybe Nneka isn't as reliable and fast as I thought she was.

Maybe that's the problem. That I'm not doing things anymore.

I had a brutally honest conversation with myself.

"Look. I know it was fun and cool working for 2 hours per day, making \$500k/year and enjoying life.

But maybe those days are over. Maybe you need to jump into the business again and do the stuff you dislike."

I see no other way. I think I need to investigate myself.

Numbers lie

They say that numbers don't lie. But in my case they did.

I decided to jump in and do the actual work myself. See with my own eyes and feel with my own hands what is happening. Not through looking at metrics and asking others in meetings.

So I started tweaking campaigns that weren't generating leads. I started performing tasks that were taking too long to complete. And I even started watching recorded sales calls.

Honestly, my first reaction was horror.

I found crazy mistakes in client campaigns. Embarrassing emails going out to clients. And everyone following systems that were outdated instead of using common sense or updating them.

Extremely salesy emails going out to hot leads that were potential clients. And sales calls that had no structure at all.

So much needed fixing. Things were actually not ok. My business metrics were all lying. This is chaos.

I had many meetings with Nneka and sorted out our systems. I had many meetings with Joel and sorted out client communication. And I had many meetings with Rayvin to sort out client campaigns.

Taking sales calls

Finally, I decided to take some sales calls too. I wanted to see things with my own eyes and understand why we can't close.

It didn't take long to realize that it wasn't Jonathan's fault. Almost all of the calls on our calendars were unqualified.

First of all, two of the calls never happened. They didn't show up. But even the ones that did happen, were bad.

The first call was with a person we reached out to offering a free lead. It looked like a great fit on paper, but he wasn't interested.

"Hey man, if I'm able to close a client from this lead, I'll definitely consider booking a call for your \$3k/month service."

The second call was with a person we contacted through cold email. It felt like a police interrogation.

"How do I know if your testimonials are real. How many clients do you have now. How long have they stayed with you. How many years are you in business. Can I have some references. Why should we trust you over the other 3 agencies we have spoken to that offer the same service."

The third call was with a person that clicked on one of our "book a call links" in the free newsletter.

"Hey man, I've been on your free newsletter for a while. I'll be honest with you, when I first saw your landing page and testimonials, I thought to myself that this was definitely a scam."

Then I slowly started receiving the leads, looking into the testimonials and clients one by one, seeing that they exist and are

real, contacted one of them, found your Twitter, YouTube and blog and finally decided to book a call."

Our question is if you do performance deals, because we have been burned by a couple of agencies in the past already.

We have lost more than \$10k working with agencies similar to yours."

Finally, the fourth and final call went exactly like the good ol' days. The person just found me from Twitter, went to the homepage and booked a call.

He came by himself. Not from any of my new marketing efforts. And I didn't have to do much to persuade him either.

I closed him easily. But for \$2k/month, our new price of \$3k/month was too expensive for everyone.

Actually, he was the only one that I closed.

Interviewing clients

Things are getting worse and worse.

Or best performing client just canceled.

If our best performing client stays for 4 months, how the fuck am I supposed to raise the average to 5 months.

I wanted to talk to him. To understand why he was leaving. And to understand why he hadn't closed a client after receiving leads every single day for months.

We had a chat. And what he said actually shocked me.

"I know we have been receiving the leads you said we would. But, to be honest, they have been a bit overwhelming. It takes a lot of effort to shift through the noise and schedule the calls. And most of them were not great fits after all.

Honestly, we would prefer to have 1 solid call per week than scheduling calls every day with bad fits."

I felt that. I had spent many hours that week too, talking to unqualified people that were wasting my time.

Everything backfiring

It seems like everything I tried to optimize, backfired.

Increasing the number of booked sales calls after a certain point did not increase our closes. It actually started backfiring and we were wasting our time with unqualified leads.

Increasing the amount of leads we forward to clients after a certain point did not increase retention either. It actually started backfiring by becoming too much for clients.

And increasing our price from \$2k/month to \$3k/month did not increase our LTV and retention either. Actually, it started backfiring because we couldn't close anyone at that price.

Finally, increasing the amount of times I post on social media did not increase my traffic and leads. It actually started backfiring, my engagement dropped and people started unfollowing me.

Pools of blood

Somehow, I wasn't surprised.

I've had the same experience with my health.

I remember a phase when I was tracking individual biomarkers and trying to become the healthiest version of myself.

I remember one time I got my lab results back. All of my blood markers were fine. But my blood pressure was elevated.

I didn't like that. Chronically elevated blood pressure increases the risk of heart attacks and strokes, the two leading causes of death.

I love life. And I love breathing. So I would love to live past 100.

I tried like crazy to move my blood pressure into the normal ranges. But even when it got there, I wasn't happy. I tried going beyond that, to "super-optimal" ranges below the reference chart.

Because, after all, I was being smart. Reference ranges are the average values of the population. Not what is optimal for you.

A couple of weeks later, I woke up in the middle of the night on the bathroom floor in a pool full of blood.

It took me a while to realize what happened. And I was so confused.

I had fainted for the first time in my life.

Part 3: Destroying the painting

We're in a meeting with Jonathan. Completely defeated. Admitting that nothing we have done has worked.

We just cannot find the solution to our problem.

We tried working on every single metric in order to replicate the inputs back when CyberLeads was at \$50k/month. It didn't work.

Then we tried focusing on the few levers of the equation of business. That didn't work either. Things even started backfiring.

We're running out of ideas.

Maybe it's time for something more radical.

A conversation with Jonathan

We only have one rule with Jonathan. No ego.

When we talk about business, it's about business. Not us. That way we can be honest without getting our feelings hurt.

But Jonathan told me something that stuck with me. I'll never forget it. I remember exactly the place I was sitting.

"Man, I feel like we could do so much more.

We could do so many things with AI and all these new tools coming out, but we're still running things old school.

To be honest, I find it hard to sell what we do. Because even I don't believe in our service anymore."

What he said hit me. Probably because it's true.

I was very skeptical about AI and all these new tools coming out because I had tried them in the past but nothing worked. They only marginally improved things, if at all, while complicating things and costing a whole lot of money.

But that was years ago. Maybe things have changed since.

Maybe CyberLeads is completely outdated.

Asking for feedback

After my conversation with Jonathan, I decided to reach out to every single client of mine. Current and past.

I felt guilty for the service they had received.

I didn't know exactly what to tell them. But this is my rule.

"When you don't know what to say, just say the truth."

So I told them exactly what happened. That I tried to remove myself from the business. That things started slipping. And that I was back.

I told them that I would love to have them as a client. And that I will be handling their campaigns personally from now on.

They loved the honesty. They were understanding. And as business owners themselves, they could relate.

Some stayed. Others left. And a couple came back.

I also asked for their brutally honest feedback. They opened Pandora's box and started telling me everything wrong with my service.

These were hour long conversations. And I took notes.

They were painful. But they were necessary.

Founder Mode vs Manager Mode

Maybe Jonathan was right.

All these years I was so focused on building the perfect business for me, that I forgot to build the perfect service for my clients.

My goal was to work as little as possible, make as much money as possible, while staying at or above industry standards.

I never wanted to be the best in the world at what I do.

Maybe that was my problem. Maybe I had my priorities mixed up. Maybe my business exists to serve others first. And I come second.

Or maybe I should've gone back and forth inside and out of the business more often.

Yes. Maybe that's it. Maybe it's seasonal.

Some times, you have to go into founder mode in order invent new things, set things up and turn the business into a machine.

Then you switch to manager mode in order to take a step back. Oversee everything. And take a break and enjoy life.

I thought this was where the journey ended. And as the years go by, you remove yourself more and more.

But now I'm thinking that it may be cyclical.

There are times where you will have to go into founder mode again

in order to fix up everything and sort out the business again.

Re-inventing CyberLeads

It's time for a new CyberLeads. Sometimes you need to come out with something that's new and fresh.

Like an artist that comes out with a new album.

To begin this whole process, I sat down and tried to imagine what my service would look like if it was ten times more expensive.

Let's say \$20k/month. What would it look like. In other words, what is the maximum I could do for my clients.

I would join them as a co-founder. I would start sending them leads from day one. All the leads would be incredible. And I would talk to them every single week to consult them on their offer and business.

I would help them build partnerships with other agencies that work with Silicon Valley startups. Help them build an audience and retweet them from my account that gets millions of views every year. Showcase them on my newsletter that 5,000 business owners receive. And help them launch new products by posting them on my Product Hunt that has tens of thousands of followers.

I would ask everyone new coming into my network if they are looking to hire an agency. And if yes, I would introduce them as a referral.

I would leverage my connections with VC funds and agencies that work with Silicon Valley startups and introduce clients to them.

I would build a community of founders in order to build a moat and hedge my bets against new competition copying me and AI. And I

would build a network where we can like and boost each others content in order to build our personal brands.

Finally, I wouldn't only reach out to funded startups. I would create custom campaigns for each client.

I would use AI. And make sure we are using all the latest and greatest tools. Even if they only help marginally.

This reminded me of an old lesson I had forgotten.

It's not about what you think your customers "need". It's about what your customers "want".

And they all want AI. They all want to feel like they are using the latest and greatest tools. And they all want to feel that they are not getting left behind.

So let them have it.

Launching the new CyberLeads

I'm not even going to go over how I built the new service.

It took me months on end, working all day. And I even started asking for cigarretes from my friends, after having quit for years.

Another 3 months went by this way.

I felt extremely productive. And in this time, CyberLeads became unrecognizable. It felt amazing.

For the first 2 years, CyberLeads was just a monthly list. And for the following 3 years it had a simple service on top.

So, for almost 5 years, it was almost the same.

But now, suddenly, it was so much more.

I was excited.

Bloated products

Sadly, everything has a cost.

The more I added to CyberLeads, the more I diluted its core. And the core is what people wanted. Even now, five years later.

For the first time ever, people were confused as to what CyberLeads does. And I had a lot of explaining to do.

Most of the time, people's reactions were this.

"Look, we were interested in the funded startup list and the cold email campaigns. But all the rest is cool too, I guess."

This destroyed me. What the fuck.

Looking back, I think that's why I dealt with competition so well. Because for years, I added almost nothing to CyberLeads.

Just the service. And my positioning was super clear.

Sometimes the first idea is the best idea. And then you just destroy it over time. That's why launching fast is important.

I have noticed the same in photography. The first photo is usually the best. The other 15 afterwards are never as good.

Most of the people that copied me kept adding features to their product. Until one day we were not competing anymore.

Maybe they did it because it's not easy to stand your ground and

keep something extremely simple for years.

Especially as the years go by and building is becoming easier and easier, simple products are like a breath of fresh air.

Or maybe they did it because they gave into that temptation.

Or maybe they did it because they were lost and were looking for the answers to their problems inside their product.

Just like I am doing now.

A painter in Cyprus

A few years ago, I was staying at a big house in Cyprus with other flat mates. One of them was an artist.

He was an abstract painter. The type that throws black paint on a canvas. I was extremely interested.

He showed me a few pieces that he sells for \$1k each. And explained his complicated process and the story behind each work. They were massive, mysterious, and intimidating.

I promised him that I'll visit his gallery when I'm in Athens. And that when I have my own house, I'll buy some art from him.

We also recorded a podcast. It's on my YouTube channel.

My main questions were around AI and making money as an artist. But the most interesting answer came from a different question.

"How do you know when a painting is finished?"

"When I name it. After I christen the painting, I'm not allowed to touch it ever again. Otherwise I'll destroy the painting."

I found that so interesting.

Pizza in Athens

Last summer I was in Athens. Getting ready to go out with my best friend. It's tradition. I visit him for a month every year.

We were lazy, so we decided to order food instead of cooking. I opened my laptop and instinctively visited the platform we used years ago, when we were still in university.

The website was unrecognizable. So many popups, features, offers, upsells and ads. Somehow, after many years, it was worse.

So many designers. So many engineers. So many product managers. So much time. And so much money. Just to make it worse.

It used to be so easy. Three clicks and the food was at your door. Now it was 100 clicks, confusing and frustrating.

They never christened the painting. They slowly destroyed it. And I wonder if I'm doing the same with CyberLeads.

Powerlifting

The first rule of powerlifting is this.

If you are progressing and adding weight to the bar, you don't change anything to your program.

The second rule of powerlifting is this.

If you are stuck, make only one change at a time, and make the smallest change you can.

First add an extra rep. That's it. See if you progress. If not, add an extra set. See if you progress. If not, add an extra day. See if you progress. If not, add an extra exercise. And so on.

You don't nuke your entire program and start from scratch, just because you are stuck. You need to iterate.

Changes should be done reluctantly. And one at a time.

And I feel like it's the same in business. If you are growing, change nothing. And if you are to change things, make single tiny changes.

I remember one time I injured my back squatting.

I had no idea why it happened. Why did I get injured? Was it because I did squats after deadlifting? I usually never do that. Or was it because of the new weightlifting shoes I bought? Was it because I slightly tweaked my technique? Was it all of the above? Or was it just a moment of losing my focus and having bad luck?

Instead of a single session, it took half a year to troubleshoot the problem. Because I introduced too many changes at once. And kept getting re-injured until I found it.

Organisms vs Machines

Back to when I fainted.

When I got back from the hospital, I called my best friend who is studying to become a doctor.

Even though I was embarrassed, I told him about it. And, of course,

he made fun of me.

"Dude, the body is an extremely complex and interconnected system. It doesn't like extremes. So stop with all this biohacking bullshit.

Eat salt if your body is asking for it. Focus on sleep, diet, exercise and stress. For your blood tests and biomarkers to be stable and close to the reference ranges. And to feel healthy.

That's as optimal as it gets."

I think the same might apply to business too. Maybe CyberLeads resembles an organism more than it resembles a machine.

It responds better to simple levers. It doesn't like extremes. And it doesn't like too many changes at the same time.

And maybe, like all organisms, it is influenced by the external environment has a finite lifespan too.

Who knows.

Illusions

The older I get, the less control I feel like I have.

I used to think that research studies gave me answers. Then I realized that they study only a handful of people, over just a single semester, under extremely specific conditions that don't resemble real life.

The reality is that we don't know much.

I also used to think that I can fix all my health problems and injuries with the best doctors, technologies and exercise.

After years of trying, at some point I realized that it was a million times easier to simply adapt than fix all my pains in my back and sternum from doing Muay Thai or Grappling.

The only thing I can do now completely pain free is boxing. And not even conventional. Only southpaw.

It's not perfect. But it works. So I'm grateful.

I also thought that I could predict the future. But for every correct prediction, I missed 100 other things.

These weren't things that I predicted wrong. There were things that I didn't even see coming.

Finally, I thought that if I worked hard enough, I would find the answers. After all, I had done it in the past.

But now I feel that maybe I cannot find the answers.

No matter how much I try.

Uncle Peter

I remember in high school, when the math professor assigned us a book to read during the Christmas break.

It was called "Uncle Petros and Goldbach's Conjecture".

It's about a mathematician who dedicates his entire life to prove one of math's unprovable theorems. It looks so simple.

"Every even number greater than 2 can be written as the sum of two prime numbers."

And it's obviously true. He checked it himself, by hand, up to the

number 10,000. All he needed was a nice, elegant proof.

So he started working on it. He was in his twenties.

The solution didn't come to him straight away, but his mentality was simple. Looking for this solution was like looking for his keys in his house. He knows the keys are in the house. So he just has to keep looking for them until he finds them.

He ended up working on it for decades. In the meantime, he became the black sheep of his family. A failure. Unmarried. Isolated. With everyone in his family feeling like he was wasting his life.

But he kept going. Searching. While slowly losing his mind.

He ended up living in a house full of beans everywhere on the floor, in geometric patterns, so he could see Goldbach's Conjecture visually.

The turning point of the book is when, after decades into his search, a new theorem is proven.

It's called "Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem". And it states that some mathematical truths can be true but impossible to prove.

In other words, "Goldbach's Conjecture" might be true, but it might not be possible to be proven true with our math.

The keys he was looking for might not be in the house after all.

This destroyed him. He started spiraling and losing his mind.

He completely lost his mind and kept working on the same problem for his entire life, up until his very last breath.

Moments before his death, he called his nephew and narrator of the book. *"Come immediately! I have found the solution to "Goldbach's Conjecture" and I need you to write it down for me! Fast!"*

By the time his nephew got there, he was dead. Stroke.

Some people believe that he had the stroke first. And in his final confused state, he imagined that he had found the solution.

Others believe the opposite.

That after 70 years of searching, he finally found the solution. But the extreme excitement caused him to have a stroke and die.

Appendix

I don't want to give up. But I also don't want to waste years of my life searching for keys in a room that has no keys.

Looking back, I think I've done that already. I've wasted years looking for keys that might not exist.

First, when I stuck at \$500k/year and couldn't grow further.

And now, when CyberLeads is dying and I cannot save it.

I always used to think that I'll always be able to find new keys to keep growing with CyberLeads.

But what scares me now is that maybe there are no more keys in this house.

What's next?

Honestly. I don't know.

I don't want to give up. But I also won't keep looking forever.

I guess I'll have to keep on looking elsewhere.

The only place left is the external.

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

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- 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.

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- 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.
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- Eneas Lari, for being my best friend in life.
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Constantly updating this list.