

**Book 13:**

**Shutting things  
down**

**(\$8,000/month,  
late 2025)**

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## **Not Business Advice**

How I made a million from my personal projects

### **Book 13: Castles in the sand**

(\$8,000/month, year 8)

#### **Table of contents**

Introduction

Part 1: Wings of wax

1. Intensity, directions and biscuits
2. Late night conversations
3. Coffee, puzzles and pretend work
4. Spiraling
5. Losing my passport
6. Losing my flight
7. Train back home
8. Hiking with friends
9. A conversation in Spain

Part 2: Pulling the plug

1. Getting desperate
2. Backfiring
3. Castles in the sand
4. A little frog in Thailand
5. Little Prince Principle
6. The middle way
7. Shutting things down
8. Reverse sabbatical
9. Simple life, happy life
10. Finding my spark

Part 3: Illusion

1. Despite vs Because
2. Business genetics
3. Broken models
4. Extinction events

5. Climate change
6. Millions of waves
7. Random squiggly lines
8. Living in the future
9. Getting left behind
10. Who moved my cheese

#### Part 4: Reflecting

1. Broken dreams
2. Ship of Theseus
3. Escape velocity
4. Floating in a history book
5. Proud grandmother
6. Rock n' rolling forever
7. Writing the books
8. An old boxer
9. Fleeting vs Persistent Adaptations
10. Updated Shotgun to Sniper
11. A museum in Milan
12. Just build

#### Appendix

1. Stupid conversations
2. Closing the chapter
3. What's next?
4. Time travel

### **Introduction**

Wow.. I don't believe it.

After all these years, I am actually shutting down CyberLeads.

I'm taking down the service offer from the homepage. Emailing all of my clients. Letting them know about it. Giving away refunds. And cutting ties with everyone.

I feel like a complete loser. And that I was wrong about everything.

CyberLeads was supposed to be my forever business. The business that would retire me. But it turns out it wasn't.

I have no idea what went wrong. And I have no idea what's next.

Actually, that's what scares me the most.

### **Part 1: Wings of wax**

Let's rewind the tape a couple of months. It's a rainy morning.

I'm in a taxi. Silent. Zero words spoken from me or the driver. I think I'm in a bad mood. And I'm not sure why.

I'm just looking at the raindrops on my window racing against each other. I'm trying to guess which one is going to win.

Grey and miserable England in the background. Depressing. The exact opposite of the tropical place I was just staying at in Asia.

Luckily I'm not here for long. I'm here to see my grandma's house for a few days. And then leave again. To be by myself. At last.

Because the reality is that I don't want to see anyone.

I just want to be alone. Work hard on my business that is dying. Figure out how to save it. And decide what's next.

I keep thinking to myself.

*"Relax. This is just a stop over. You will soon be in Cyprus."*

### **Intensity, direction, and biscuits**

I'm sitting with my grandma.

We're drinking tea, eating biscuits and watching TV.

It's late at night. And I hate that tomorrow is Monday. It's been years since I've had this feeling. And I hate it.

I have emails I haven't opened. I have clients I haven't contacted. And I've been procrastinating and I'm late with everything.

This is so weird. This is not me. I don't even recognize myself.

After all, a big part of my identity was that I love what I do so much. And I used to work all day no problem.

But what I've realized is that it's actually easy to work for 16 hours per day on a business that is thriving. A business that is growing and has happy clients that are getting results.

I never complained. I was excited. And I even enjoyed it.

What was hard was working now. Now that things aren't going well. Now that my business is flat and even declining. Now that my clients aren't happy. And now that I am completely lost.

I find it more difficult to work for 10 minutes on my failing business, than I did working for 16 hours on my thriving business.

It is lack of direction, progress and results. Not hours worked. That makes me feel like I want to quit.

### **Late night conversations**

The news just finished. My grandma switches the TV off and turns to me, eyes sparkling, to ask about my travels.

I promised to her that I would tell her. After all, traveling is her favorite thing in the world. She has been everywhere.

I grab my laptop in order to make it more interesting and interactive for her. I show her the places I visited on the world map. We read a little bit about them. And finally I show her photos I took.

But the more I talk about my travels and the more I hear myself talk out loud, the more I realize that I didn't do anything.

Like. Nothing. I just kept changing houses. While trying to get into a program and figure out how to save my business.

I wasn't like this. When I first started traveling, I was organized.

I would research different countries. Find the best cities and neighborhoods. And find beautiful long term apartments.

When I got there, I would find a good gym. A good supermarket. Events and places to meet people. And I would get into a great routine.

But now it was the opposite.

I was booking the wrong hotels. In the wrong neighborhoods. And short term because I could not find anything good last minute.

Disgusting neighborhoods. Depressing apartments. And by the time I managed to get into something like a program, I had to move again.

We counted 12 houses and 4 countries in 13 weeks. We were laughing. But for me, actually, it wasn't funny.

I decided to go to bed. I ended up spinning around and staring at the ceiling all night, thinking about work. I was jetlagged.

In my half dreaming state, I didn't know what time it was. What country I was in. What time of the year it was. Or what language I was supposed to speak.

### **Coffee, puzzles and pretend work**

The next day, I got up in the morning, had a coffee and added a few pieces to my grandma's puzzle.

It's a difficult one. There's a huge blue sky without any clouds. And every piece looks exactly the same. I worked on the orange cat.

A few minutes later, I was at the local cafe, trying to work.

I didn't want to. But I had no other option. My automations were breaking. Clients were complaining. And revenue was declining.

Everytime I sit down with my hot coffee and open my laptop, I have a spark of hope, inspiration and motivation.

*"Yep. Today is the definitely the day. I can feel it. It's the day I'm gonna kick it's ass and get everything done."*

However, a few seconds later, that feeling disappears. As if it never happened. I scroll around. Do the least important task just to feel a little bit productive. And avoid doing all the important stuff.

I am ghosting my employees. And canceling my meetings with clients.

I am not opening my emails until Wednesday or Thursday. And when I do, I reply to the wrong people.

I've completely stopped posting online. I've stopped doing marketing. And I've stopped following up with leads to try and close them.

I've stopped going to the gym. I've stopped calling my family. And I've stopped hanging out with friends.

I know exactly what I'm doing. I'm self sabotaging myself.

And I'm doing pretend work.

## **Spiraling**

It's not just me slacking off and not getting work done.

Nneka hasn't been reliable lately either. She's been absent from our meetings. And she's been late with her tasks.

Maybe it's because I'm too chill and cool with everyone. Or maybe it's because she has a second client now and is focusing more on them.

To be honest, all these things were perfectly ok in the past.

The real issue is that I have to cut costs. My profits are being squeezed right now and I am close to breaking even for the first time

in my life. It's scary.

My goal is to cut all the software expenses I don't need. And pause my work with Nneka and Jonathan. That should halve my expenses.

The software subscriptions are not needed. Jonathan has his own business that makes over \$10k/month. And Nneka's work is not needed either. I have been procrastinating on this for a year now. I could easily divide her tasks between Joel and Rayvin.

I canceled the subscriptions. Done. Easy. Then I had a conversation with Jonathan. Done. As always. Easy. Only love and no ego.

The only thing left is Nneka. She has been doing almost nothing for a year. And it's not her fault. It's mine.

I called my family, business partner and friends to talk about it.

Most told me that I should think logically and do what is best for the business and myself. My best friend, however, told me to keep her.

*"But what does he know anyway. He has never ran a business. He is a communist. And everyone is generous with other peoples money.*

*But who helps me? Who gives me free money? Who saves me? No one."*

Ok, maybe I can land somewhere in the middle. Pause and part ways with Nneka for now. She can focus on her second client in the meantime. And when I have more work again, we'll immediately continue.

But that's just pretty words. The reality is that I'm firing her.

I requested a meeting with her for a few days later.

In the meantime, she just texted me that she won't be able to make it to our next team meeting because she has a stomach ache.

Not the first time I've heard this excuse. This is perfect. It's the right choice. Maybe it's mutual. And maybe this is silent quitting.

One day before our meeting, she texts me the following.

*"Hi Alex, really sorry about that. The reason for my stomach aches is that I'm 6 weeks pregnant. We were not expecting this at all that's why we rushed to the hospital earlier."*

I still fired her.

## **Losing my passport**

I always said that I would never fire anyone in my life.

But this is another reminder that all my morals are bullshit stories I tell to myself to feel better. They don't mean shit until they are tested in the real world.

I just fired a pregnant lady. I feel sick. And I want to vomit.

This ship is sinking. And it's not just me being impacted.

It's my team. Their families. And even tiny little humans that never asked to be born. I don't like it. But it's reality.

Was also kills me is that Nneka was probably my best employee. And at the same time, she was completely understanding.

She was the one that had to go. Alongside Jonathan.

I just need to get to Cyprus. And I will fix everything. I will revive the business and re-hire everyone.

I know what I need. I need a calm routine. To sleep and wake up in the same bed, every day. And to finally start working again.

I need to do this now. Every second is precious.

I book a flight for the next day. And I start packing my bags.

Clothes. Check. Laptops. Check. Chargers. Check. Phone. Check. Wallet. Check. Passport.. passport.. where the hell is my passport..

I've been losing my stuff lately. I wasn't like this.

I leave my camera in one apartment. My charger in another. And my jacket in the taxi.

My family can barely believe how I've managed to travel the world and still be in one piece and alive.

Me, my mother and grandmother tried to find my passport. We went through every single centimeter of the house 100 times.

But we couldn't find it anywhere. How is this possible.

It was here on the table just a few days ago.

I'm sure it was. I think.

### **Losing my flight**

I'm starting to freak out.

*"Man, if I can't find it, I will miss my flight to Cyprus.*

*And I will have to fly with my Greek ID to my hometown in Greece and stay there at my father's house for a whole month until I get my new passport. I swear, if I have to do that I will go insane."*

I'm looking for my passport like a maniac. Going through the same drawers one hundred times. And going downstairs to check the bins.

In the meantime, my friends are texting me to know when I'm arriving. And my clients are emailing me for urgent meetings.

Eventually, I accept my fate. And book a flight to Greece.

I go to the airport. But for some reason, I can't check in.

*"Excuse me sir, I can't check in."*

*"Yes sir. That's because your ticket is booked for the 18th of next month, not this month."*

Shit. I can't even function anymore. I wasn't like this.

I go to the cafeteria and book another flight. For the same day. It's crazy expensive, but I don't even care how much it costs.

After waiting for many hours, I end up being left behind. They overbooked my flight.

### **Train back home**

Completely defeated, embarrassed and tired, I decided to get the late night train back home to my grandma's house.

The whole way back, I am thinking of how stupid I am. I am a total mess. How did I ever run a business and become successful.

I get back home, walk through the door and explain what happened.

We are all trying to find the humour in it. And we all pretend to be laughing about it.

I also pretend to be cool, but I cannot sit around. I book a ticket for the next day. I need to go.

I triple check the dates to make sure they are correct. And cancel all of my meetings the next day.

In that moment, a thought came to me.

*"Maybe this is why I lost my flight. To find my passport."*

I start looking for it again. This time I'm certain I'll find it. I go through the bins downstairs and through the same drawers.

It's nowhere. But I keep on looking. Hopelessly.

Inside that chaos, my mother enters the room and speaks to me.

*"Alex, sweetheart.. are you ok?"*

I hugged her for a minute straight.

*"No.. I just want a normal life again.."*

## **Hiking with friends**

Fast forward a month, I'm in Cyprus. Finally. Hiking with friends.

During the hike, we naturally start breaking into smaller and smaller groups. I end up having a conversation with a good friend of mine and fellow entrepreneur, Andreas.

*"Man, I'm not sure if I should shut down CyberLeads and take a break. Or if I should just push through for a few more years and then retire or some shit. I've been calculating how much I need depending on my lifestyle and country I want to live in."*

*"Push through? Retire? What are these words you're using man. This isn't you. You should be excited about what you're working on and have that spark inside you, like you used to have, until you're 80. Ok then, tell me, let's say you retired today, what would you do?"*

I've never answered a question faster in my life.

*"I would completely stop traveling. And I would rent a beautiful house here by the sea to relax.*

*I would shut down the service and only run the newsletter, just to cover my expenses. And live a very simple life.*

*Lift and train martial arts again. Cook, swim and hang out with friends. And write all of my books at last.*

*I feel like I have gathered enough stimuli in the past few years. New languages. New people. New countries. New food. New friends. New products. New businesses. New services. New milestones. Money. Fame. Plateaus. And crashing to the ground.*

*I would to sit down to reflect and digest everything. And hopefully through this process figure out what's next."*

*"Then why don't you do that?"*

## **A conversation in Spain**

A few years ago I was in Spain for a few months.

I made many friends there. One of them was an Italian guy called Heracles. I always get along with Italians.

He asked me the following question.

*"Dude, are you really making \$300k/year like you say on Twitter?"*

*"Bro. Please don't insult me like that. Here, look."*

*"Man, that's crazy. That's so much money."*

In that moment, I jumped on my high horse and said some pseudo-philosophical bullshit that sounded cool in my head.

*"Man, after self employment, living as if money doesn't exist, never looking at prices and treating everyone around me, which for me is \$5k/month, everything else is just a number on a screen."*

*"Sure.. But that number on the screen might save your ass one day."*

I didn't think anything of it. After all, the only way forward is up and to the right. This is only the beginning.

But for some reason, his reply has stuck with me. Especially now.

He was right.

## **Part 2: Pulling the plug**

It's morning. Hot coffee steaming, even in the summer.

I'm going through the client report. No one is closing deals.

Somehow, this kills me more than anything else. More than the declining revenue. More than being lost.

Maybe this is the reason I can't work.

If I can fix this, I can fix everything.

## **Getting desperate**

Ok, let's try something radical again. A \$10k/year plan.

Clients will stop stressing and complaining, since they won't be billed monthly anymore and we have so much time.

The price will be extremely low, at \$800/month.

And most importantly, there is no way we won't be able to make our money back in a whole year. Either through a referral, a partnership or a cold email campaign.

It's literally impossible. And to increase our odds of success even more, I'll also give them access to my calendar.

This way we'll be able to talk about everything, brainstorm together, think out of the box and iterate until we close a client.

Finally, my LTV right now is \$6k. Now it will be \$10k. And if they renew, \$20k.

Everything makes sense. I hope this works.

## **Backfiring**

I signed a few people with this annual plan. And everything looked amazing. At least at first.

That is until my calendar was flooded.

I remember one client in particular. We had been working together for months. And he was booking a call with me every single week.

The girl I was with would ask me.

*"Him again? What do you even talk about?"*

We weren't just working on his marketing. We were launching new products. Testing new services. And I was even doing founder therapy because he was stressed out and lost.

But the irony is that the more I offered and gave, the more expectations rose and they asked for.

One day, on our weekly meeting, he said something that hit me.

*"Alex.. I want to be honest with you.. the results are not where they should be.. and.. frankly.. I feel like you don't even care about my business.."*

I didn't even reply.

It's ironic. Now that I was offering everything to my clients, they were treating me like shit. When I had a strict no meeting, no custom work, not guarantees and monthly billing policy, they didn't.

That same month, another client, who I was very close with and knew for years, decided to cut our agreement short at 2 months instead of 12. I refunded him according to our agreement, plus more. When I asked if he's ok and why he doesn't want to continue, he issued a chargeback for the remaining amount and ghosted me. We haven't spoken since.

Half of me wanted to laugh and smile. The other half wanted to throw my laptop into the sea. See if it will skip like a flat stone. Disappear into the distance. Sink to the bottom. And never see it again.

I don't want to do this anymore.

### **Castles in the sand**

I didn't throw my laptop. I'm not that brave. I just left it at home and went for a walk on the beach.

I made a few calculations in my head. After the refunds and chargebacks, I have broken even this month. First time ever.

I called a good friend of mine, who recently sold his business and is traveling the world with his girlfriend.

I asked him all about it. How life has been. If he regretted it. If he's bored. And then share my experience with CyberLeads right now.

He replied to me naturally and confidently.

*"Man, selling my business was the best thing I ever did. And I'm the happiest I've ever been. I think it's because by the end of it, I hated my own business."*

After our phone call, I went and found the girl I was with to go walk on the beach together. On our walk, we saw a sand castle.

A kid had probably made it that same morning. But it was destroyed now by the waves. In that moment, it reminded me of CyberLeads.

All these years I thought I had built something great. I had a lawyer. An accountant. Employees in every time zone. Clients from every country. Followers from all over the world. Bank and brokerage accounts in different jurisdictions. Hundreds of automations. And millions in revenue, profit and views.

To be honest, I felt like I had built an empire. But, maybe, possibly, after all, at the end of the day, perhaps, who knows. Maybe it was just a castle in the sand.

### **A little frog in Thailand**

It's night time. And I'm beautifully high.

I'm sitting on the patio of my little wooden beach house. Doing nothing. Just breathing. Enjoying the moment. And dreaming.

I go into the house to grab something. And find a little baby frog.

*"Haha.. so cute.. so tiny.. yet completely alive.."*

My first thought is to leave it there and pretend that I didn't see it. Let it have it's peace. And let me have my peace too.

But as I turn around to go outside again, another thought came to me.

*"Man.. if I leave it here it will starve to death. Maybe I should take it and release it outside."*

I turn around to go back to grab it. Another thought hit me.

*"But.. if I take it outside it might be eaten by the birds, cats, lizards, snakes or other animals."*

Being high didn't help. It made it feel extremely important and that I was chosen by the gods to save this little being.

*"Pff.. all I wanted was a peaceful evening.. Why god. Why universe. Why randomness. Why am I in charge of this living thing now?"*

I accepted my fate. Somehow, whether I liked it or not, this weight has been placed on my shoulders. I shall bear it.

Me and the girl I was with spent the next hour strategizing.

We let him rest a little because he was jumping around like crazy trying to escape from my CyberLeads hat. We researched and found that frogs don't have the energy for many jumps. Every jump is precious.

We found a beautiful safe bush, so that he would stay hidden from danger. It was close to a water sprinkler and to a lamp post so that there are flies and mosquitoes for it to hunt and eat.

Life is not easy. He has so much training and learning to do. Let's try and make it a little bit easier.

For the next few weeks, every time we walked past that little bush next to the lamp post, we would try to spot him or hear him. Wondering if he ever became a dad to continue his legendary bloodline.

We also gave our tiny friend a name. Nong Noi.

It means little frog in Thai.

## Little Prince Principle

Nong Noi reminded me of an old book I read as a child.

The book is called "The Little Prince". And it's about a little prince that travels throughout the galaxy and makes friends.

From the whole book, I only remember one thing.

On one planet, the Prince finds a field with hundreds of roses, identical to his rose, that he was so in love with.

His first reaction was sadness. For he realized that his rose wasn't unique and there were hundreds just like it.

But then it hit him. The thought. The realization. I'm paraphrasing, but the point is this.

*"My rose is more important than all the roses in the world. Not because it's different. But because it's MY rose."*

Many years later, I get it. And it's something I almost forgot while giving money to charities in a faceless and egoless way.

Do I pay off my girlfriend's student loans? Do I pay for cancer treatments of family members? Or do I give that amount of money to charity to statistically save childrens lives?

These questions used to torture me. Until I realized that the world isn't a spreadsheet. And that not everything should be quantified.

There are billions of frogs in the world. Yes. But Nong Noi is my frog. So he comes first. And I will try to save him.

There are billions of employees in the world. True. But Jonathan, Rayvin, Joel and Nneka are my employees. And as long as I can, I will keep them employed and re-hire them again and again.

There are billions of people in the world. I know. But my family, friends and girlfriend are my people. So they come first and I will support them with everything I've got.

MY frog. MY employees. MY girlfriend. MY family. MY friends.

You start by helping yourself. Then the people around you. Finally, the rest of the world. And then all at the same time.

### **The middle way**

I could easily just sit and do nothing. I have money in the bank for decades. And I could run the newsletter by myself too.

The newsletter alone would cover my expenses. And then my investments would keep on growing.

But, the same way I cannot keep running the service, I also cannot just shut everything down. I have a team.

Seriously. In the past, when I heard people say stuff like this I would cringe. And found it extremely patronizing and pretentious.

*"Who do you think you are. You are not their savior. And you are not that important. They can just find another job."*

But I know for a fact that the market is terrible at the moment. They have been looking for extra clients for years.

So why not find a way to keep my team? Find a way to keep running CyberLeads in a chill way, while also keeping people employed.

I tried a few experiments. And something took off.

At last. Finally. I can't believe it. Some good news.

It was the consulting offer.

### **Shutting things down**

I used to make fun of consultants. But, hey, once again, here I am. Life is irony.

Now I'm offering a consulting service.

I offer everything I did for clients for \$3k/month, but for a single payment of \$3k now.

I feel good at this price. It's fair. And I don't even have sales calls. I just have a self-checkout page people can use.

I have calls with them and walk them through every step of the process and tell them exactly what I would do if I were them.

What's interesting is that I actually believe in this service. And I'm not sure if this belief is real or just intellectual gymnastics.

Suddenly I feel like marketing shouldn't be outsourced. It shouldn't even be done in-house. It's a founder activity.

It's the oxygen of the business. And no one is going to care about your business the way you will. It's your business.

I also know from experience that marketing is not a science. You need to keep experimenting like crazy until you find it.

I might try 3-4 different experiments for your business based on my experience. But you might need to try 30 different things.

I've started having a few consulting calls. This is easy. Very easy. And it feels better too.

I don't feel sad like I thought I would.

I feel relief.

### **Reverse sabbatical**

The consulting offer was a success. I made \$20k the first month of launching it. All profit. With zero expenses.

And over the following months, it stabilized at around \$8k/month. Or \$100k/year. It's exactly what I had hoped for.

It doesn't feel like a lot of money. Actually, I feel broke.

But I try to remind myself that 5 years ago this was my dream.

Making \$100k/year for sending a list on the first of every month. And having a few chill meetings every Friday with clients.

I parted ways with Jonathan. Gave a few months of salary to Nneka. And kept Joel and Rayvin to help me run the newsletter and new service.

Finally, I can take a little break and write my books.

Take a sabbatical. Or as I sometimes call it, a reverse sabbatical.

Instead of traveling, stop traveling. Instead of zero work, write all day. Instead of being hyper stimulated from traveling all the time, live in a simple environment, doing the same things every day.

Basically, I want to follow my old advice again.

*"When in doubt, do the opposite of what you've been doing."*

### **Simple life, happy life**

Ironically, this has recharged me more than I can explain.

It reminded me that everything needs balance. There are times I want to travel and gather as much stimuli as possible. Other times, I want nothing. I just want to sit and digest it all.

There are times I want to read and learn things all day. Other times I want to read nothing. I just want to write my own stuff.

I decided to rent a house. And remembering my own experience in Italy, I knew that this is not the place to save money.

So I signed a contract for a beautiful apartment on the beach.

It's expensive, but it's amazing. Open space. Bright. Massive windows. Amazing view of the sea. At night you can only see the stars, the big boats in distance, and hear the waves. And in the morning it's so bright you cannot help but smile.

And most importantly, it's opposite my favorite cafe in the world to work from. I think it will be the perfect place to write as well.

I brought my telescope and all my other museum pieces. And I even decorated it a little bit. I call it my home now.

For the first time in years, I have a proper base again.

I'm sleeping and waking up in the same bed every day. And walking slowly everywhere, instead of taking planes, trains or riding motorbikes in traffic.

I have a little routine that I love.

I wake up. I walk slowly to my cafe. I say good morning to everyone and grab a coffee and write for a few hours.

Then I go home and cook. I walk to the gym. And I workout with my friend who is the trainer there.

Then I walk to the beach in front of my house and swim to the rocks and back. When I get back home, I have a shower, eat again and either relax, write, or hang out with friends.

Work feels interesting again too. This gives me a lot of hope.

When I was traveling the world, I was hyper stimulated. New culture, new languages, new people and new scenery and nature.

In that moment, working on my business CRM seemed like the most boring thing in the world. But now, in this beautiful but simple environment, work feels interesting again.

## **Finding my spark**

I can't believe it. I have my spark back.

I am making friends every I go again. Seeing the magic of the world. And saying good morning to strangers. I am happy.

I'm having amazing conversations with everyone. Random people on the street. People working at the supermarket. And taxi drivers. Exchanging numbers at the end of the ride in order to keep in touch.

Working with friends at my favorite cafe in the world. All together, until 11pm at night, laughing and joking around.

The most diverse friend group in the world.

Talking about fighting with the 17 year old boxer.

Talking about dreams and goals with the 20 year olds.

Talking about business and travel with the 25 year olds.

Talking about family and women with the 30 year olds.

Talking about philosophy and history with the 50 year olds.

And wrestling with 10 year old Alex, the son of one of the managers.

Going to bed at night, disappointed that I have to wait so many hours for the next morning. Jumping out of bed in the middle of the night to take a note about my books that I'm just about to start.

Expression is the opposite of depression, after all.

And.. sometimes.. happiness is more about chemistry and biology, than it is about psychology and philosophy.

I love my life again.

### **Part 3: Illusion**

I open my editor. The blinking cursor is staring back at me.

Fine. I'll write. Maybe that's how I'll find the answers.

I'm going to take all my thousands of daily blog posts. Public ones. Private ones. And turn them into a cohesive story.

Some books are already mostly written. They are my old long form blog posts that thousands of people have already read.

But the latest ones will have to be written from scratch. I'm scared. I haven't written long form in years.

I also feel some guilt. I should be building a business and making money. Not pretending to be an author.

After all, I'm an entrepreneur. Not an artist.

### **Despite vs Because**

Reflecting hasn't helped much.

Actually, the more I try to reflect, the more lost I feel.

The more I analyze the past, the more it feels like I succeeded despite of what I did. And not because of what I did.

Because, in many ways, I have realized that I am a terrible entrepreneur. And I'm not just saying it. I believe it.

I don't sign contracts. I am lazy. I don't reply fast. And I give discounts and refunds without being asked.

I keep employees on payroll for years because I'm too soft to fire them. And I block my competitors so I don't know what they are doing.

I don't keep up with the latest news and tools of my industry. And I don't even try to be the best in the world at what I do.

Looking back, I think my growth was mostly because of CyberLeads. Not me. CyberLeads was just that good.

When CyberLeads was flying, management, sales and marketing felt easy. I felt like a genius. And that I could do nothing wrong.

I mistook my success for mastery. Even though all I did was post once per day on Twitter. Had sales calls on Friday. And ran around

like a headless chicken without systems to deliver results to clients.

When CyberLeads was dying, I was posting on every channel. I was building complicated systems. And I had people working for me.

But it didn't matter. Nothing was working. And I felt like an idiot.

## **Business genetics**

In many ways, it feels like CyberLeads was supposed to be a \$500k/year business all along. It had great genetics.

And I don't mean the idea, payment button and landing page. Because many people copied me but went nowhere.

I mean the complete combination of everything. Internally and externally. My channels, retention and pricing. My personal brand, the market conditions at the time, and more.

I think this was my mistake. I was looking for the answer to why CyberLeads was dying internally. When the answer was external.

I remember thinking.

*"Wow.. I'm making \$250k/year without even trying. Imagine if I actually worked all day, hired people and marketed on every channel."*

But after that \$500k/year plateau, nothing I did mattered.

I signed more or less the same amount of clients, no matter how much I tried. I kept my clients more or less for the same time, no matter much I tried. And I charged more or less the same amount of money, no matter how much I tried.

After squeezing the 20% gains in each of these metrics, which doubled my business from \$250k/year to \$500k/year, I was stuck.

Diminishing returns kicked in hard.

## **Broken models**

When I first started writing, I was excited thinking of all the frameworks and theories I was going to come up with.

But the more I wrote, and the more I looked back and reflected, the more I realized that every single one of my frameworks broke.

It has happened way too many times to ignore.

For example, initially, I believed that everything is linear. Probably because that's what they taught me in school.

The more you study, the better your grades. The more you work, the higher your salary. The longer you are in business, the more you grow.

But my linear model broke fast. Once I got to \$100/month, I got stuck there for two years. Regardless of how much I worked or tried.

Two years later, I went from being stuck to skyrocketing. I went from \$100/month, to \$2k/month, to quitting my job, to \$4k/month and beyond.

Now I was certain that everything compounds. Now I know. Everything happens slowly, then all at once. And it keeps on growing.

But my new compounding model broke too. I plateaued at around \$5k/month with the newsletter. And I stopped growing.

Ok, now I truly know. Things happen slowly, then all at once, until diminishing returns start kicking in.

It looks like the letter S. It's an S curve. Many things in nature and biology follow this exact same pattern too.

My model was extended when I discovered the service which skyrocketed me to \$500k/year, where I got stuck again.

Basically, I rode another S curve.

Ah, I see. Now I get it.

Businesses are a sequence of S curves, each one reaching a different plateau. My first S curve reached \$100/month, the second \$5k/month and the third \$500k/year.

But this model had to be tweaked too. When CyberLeads started dying, I realized that these S curves aren't really S curves. They are S curves that rise, plateau, and eventually fall.

Diminishing returns kick in, making it harder to grow. Then they make it harder to even stay flat. And finally they make it harder to even slow down the fall. Maybe everything has a finite lifespan. Just like an organism. Nothing good lasts forever.

Marketing becomes harder as you scale to colder and colder audiences. So it gets harder to keep signing more and more customers.

Expectations for your product or service rise as more and more options appear. So it gets harder to keep customers happy and to stay long.

Finally, pricing tends to go down due to competition too. So it's hard to keep raising your price with the same offer.

Finally. Now I have been through it all. Now I have the complete picture. Now I see. And I understand everything.

This model represents biology even more. So I was confident.

And it's exactly what happened to me and CyberLeads. I skyrocketed. Then I hit diminishing returns. Then I skyrocketed again. Then I hit diminishing returns again. Then I had to fight to stay at the same level. And finally I had to fight to slow down the fall.

But the more the years go by, and the more I write and reflect, the less confident I am in all of these theories and models.

The most likely scenario is that everything I just wrote will also get extended or broken too.

This is simply my anecdotal experience with CyberLeads. And it's just one business story in a sea of millions.

Other entrepreneurial stories may be flat. Linear. Exponential. S curves. Sin waves. Cosin waves. Assymptotes. Or random.

Or maybe they are all random. And we just try to create models looking backwards so we feel more comfortable in the uncertainty.

### **Extinction events**

The other thing I realized is that my predictive capabilities suck.

And even when I was correct. It didn't matter.

These were my main theories as to why CyberLeads would last for at least another decade.

That agencies will still exist in the future, since companies will still provide services to other companies for money.

That funded startups will still exist in the future too, since VC funding has existed for decades already.

And that email will still exist, since it's one of the oldest technologies on the internet. It's more than 50 years old.

I was correct about all those things. But it didn't matter.

The world is more than my 3 assumptions. It's infinite variables. Most of which we can't even see.

What I find mindblowing is that if there is a 99% chance of an event happening, the possibility of a 1000 independent 99% events like that happening is 0.43%.

Less than half of a percent.

I think that's why world history always seems so obvious, explainable and easy to understand looking backwards. By definition, almost all of the events that happened were extremely likely to happen.

Of course that person raised to power. Of course that political move tanked the economy. Of course their geographical advantage won them the war. Of course progress was guaranteed.

But at the same time, we can't even predict which way the stock market will move tomorrow. Because there are infinite variables, most of which we can't see to add to our models.

I made the same mistake.

I was trying to predict the tiny earthquakes and waves I could see, while missing the invisible giant tsunamis and meteors that were coming towards me.

## **Climate change**

It's hard to predict the future and what will happen. My industry has become unrecognizable in the last 5 years.

Sadly, nothing good lasts forever.

As far as the newsletter goes, AI came along, and in the near future it might be able to generate my monthly list in a single prompt.

"Give me every single startup that raised funding in the past month. Include CEO information, linkedin and email."

As far as the service goes, AI has made campaign copywriting easier. Other companies have made the price of B2B leads essentially free. And new tools have done the same to email sending prices.

It used to cost thousands to collect leads. Now it costs \$49/month. It used to cost thousands per month to send emails at scale. Now it cost \$99/month.

You used to have to spend years to learn how to scrape leads and automate processes. Now you can use no-code tools and AI.

The difficulty and cost of running my business dropped by 10X.

Which sounds great, until you realize that there is no barrier to entry anymore.

Business influencers started promoting my business model as the best way to become a millionaire in 90 days.

I went from having very few competitors, to having thousands of competitors within a couple of years.

18 year old kids. Scammers. Fake gurus.

Fake testimonials. Fake numbers. Spam everywhere.

I used to say that competition doesn't matter. After all, I only needed 20 clients from the whole damn world to make \$500k/year.

But the reality is that no market is endless. After a while, everyone interested in purchasing this service had been burned by an agency.

I went from default trustable, to default scammer. Potential customers went from default excited, to default suspicious.

With so many emails flooding inboxes, Google and Microsoft decided to fight spam. Every 6 months we had breaking changes. And all my systems needed replacement.

Cold email stopped working. And no one was closing deals anymore.

Twitter was bought by Elon Musk, the richest man in the world. The homepage algorithm changed from "Following" to "For You".

What that means is that the content you see now is not from the people you follow. It's what the algorithm thinks you want to see.

Number of followers doesn't matter anymore. What matters is if your content can go viral. So I lost my advantage.

Competition also rose. All you had to do is post once a day 5 years ago. That put you in the top 1% of creators.

Today, anyone can connect an AI bot in 10 seconds and schedule posts. Today, you need to be posting a video per day to stand out.

And, in the future, you might have to live stream every day.

I get less views and engagement now at 40,000 followers than I used to get at 5,000 followers. It's not even close.

So yes. I predicted 3 waves correctly. But I didn't predict any of the tsunamis coming towards me.

### **Millions of waves**

It's another beautiful morning to write.

I go to the cafe. I grab my coffee. And open my laptop.

But before I start writing, I check Twitter. To see what's new.

A new AI video model is out. And everyone is going crazy about it. It's the end of Hollywood, video editors and the news.

Some are building things with it. Trying to make some money.

I close Twitter and open my editor to write. I have a smirk and an air of superiority around me.

*"Let these people chase trends. I'm not interested. I'm better than them. I'm not looking to make a quick buck. I'm looking to build something the proper way to last and change my life forever.*

*After all, I completely ignored the Crypto wave. I completely ignored the NFT wave. And I completely ignored the AI wave. And stayed laser focused on CyberLeads. For years."*

*And because of that.. CyberLeads succeeded.. Right?.."*

That was the story I told myself for the past few years. That I am not chasing or riding waves.

But I never took a moment to think about it deeper. And now that I did, I'm not so sure about it.

And that's scary. I wonder how many other beliefs I carry out of inertia and never examine.

This is the power of writing. You take the time to examine carefully little pebbles in your mind that you never would otherwise.

Because, looking back, I absolutely rode waves.

First of all, I built an internet business. I didn't join a dying industry like the newspaper, steel or radio industry.

But even beyond that, I rode other waves too.

I rode the Bootstrapping, Solopreneurship and Build in Public waves. Everyone was interested in what we were doing and our revenue numbers. And we were going viral all the time.

I rode the Covid wave. Every company in the world suddenly started hiring remotely. It was perfect timing, as companies started hiring my remote agency instead of hiring in-house people.

Even after Covid, I rode the insane money printing wave that flooded the US economy with dollars. Every US company was hiring employees and agencies, and then those agencies were hiring me. It was a party.

Finally, I also rode the newsletter wave. There was a time when paid newsletters were considered cool and were the latest trend. That made a lot of people and media talk about and cover CyberLeads.

And so many others waves. Millions of waves. Small ones and big ones.

These are just the ones I can see.

## **Random squiggly lines**

Some waves might skyrocket you. Other waves might destroy you. And some waves might barely impact you at all.

I was benefited by the Covid wave. Gym owners were crushed by it.

I was crushed by the new wave of 18 year old entrepreneurs. Gurus selling Get Rich Quick Schemes benefited by the same wave.

Finally, some waves didn't affect me at all. Like the Crypto, NFT and AI waves I successfully ignored and kept growing.

And this was my mistake. I learnt the wrong lesson. My strategy of ignoring waves worked because these waves didn't affect me. But then I thought that I should ignore every single wave from now on, forever.

I think the magic of entrepreneurship is deciding how to respond to each wave while sailing the oceans. Which waves to capitalize on. Which waves to adapt to. And which waves to completely ignore.

When to slightly adjust the sails. When to ignore and keep going. When to grab the steering wheel and start screaming to everyone to pull the ropes. And when to grab your crew and jump into the lifeboat.

All these millions of waves will influence your trajectory upwards, downwards, sideways or in circles. Their impact will also be affected by your actions and how you respond to them.

So you cannot expect your business to fall perfectly into a model like linear, compounding, S curve or whatever.

Some business models will be benefited by many waves back to back. Some people will be destroyed by things that happened in their personal life.

Your growth curve will be unique. A crazy, random squiggly line.

## Living in the future

I think the best way to predict and catch the big and important waves is to simply live in the future.

There is an expression that says that the future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed.

I agree with that. I believe I used to live in the future too. Along with a few other thousand people on Twitter.

You don't have to be first. And you don't have to be completely unique either. You just have to be earlier than most of the world.

I remember telling my family, back in 2017, that I was looking for a remote job. And that I wanted to build a remote business, hire people I've never met before online and travel the world.

They looked at me as if I had two heads.

*"Alex.. what do you mean remote job. And what do you mean hiring people online that you have never met. Business is meeting with other people in person, looking each other in the eyes and exchanging ideas.*

*And what do you mean you want to travel the world. Humans have been nomads for 99% of their existence. But they only started progressing when they settled down. You need base to progress in life."*

A few years later, after the pandemic happened and countless companies went remote overnight, everyone finally understood what we were talking about. Even my parents.

And it wasn't just remote work. It was building in public. Bootstrapping. Solopreneurship. Traveling the world as a digital nomad. Hiring overseas. Automating things. And so on.

All these things were new, impressive, taboo and even extreme.

Now they are completely normalized. Absorbed into the mainstream business culture, given as advice to everyone to follow.

Every young kid I talk to nowadays wants to solo bootstrap a company, automate it, hire a few people remotely and travel the world.

Basically, they want to do what I did.

Maybe I'm not living in the future anymore.

Maybe I've lost my edge.

### **Getting left behind**

I remember a couple of years ago, a fellow agency owner and competitor of mine requested to have a meeting.

He wanted to chat and exchange tips and tricks. So I accepted.

He was a cool guy. The call was fun, friendly and warm. And we were both completely transparent about our businesses.

We were both at \$500k/year in revenue. And everything seemed to be similar on the surface.

That was until we started talking about the intangibles.

I was running CyberLeads solo. At 80% margins. Had niched down and productized everything. Had a very easy funnel with people upgrading from the newsletter. Had automated 90% of operations. And had 4 contractors from Asia and America to fill in the gaps.

On the other hand, he was thinking of shutting the whole thing down. He had co-founders. Offices in London. Was spending money to do marketing and acquire every client. Did completely custom work for everyone. And had around 15 contractors and employees.

They were breaking even.

I felt good for myself. But I felt bad for him.

Mostly because he wasn't dumb. And he wasn't that much older than me either. But it felt like he was living in the past.

Sometimes I walk through a cafe and see young kids building and automating things with AI that took me years.

I wonder if I'm getting left behind as well.

### **Who moved my cheese**

A little book I love is called "Who moved my cheese".

It's about two mice and two tiny people who find cheese every day in a maze. They go to the same spot every day and eat.

Slowly over time, the cheese starts getting less and less. Until one day, it is completely gone.

The mice accept it quickly and start searching the maze for new cheese. But the tiny people keep going back to the same spot, hoping the old cheese will return.

That's how I feel right now. Someone moved my cheese. And I don't want to keep going back to the same place.

I don't want to starve to death. I want to start searching for new cheese again.

### **Part 4: Reflecting**

My biggest realization from writing these books. It's ok to be lost.

I used to think that I would only be lost in the beginning. And from a point onwards, everything would be clear.

But looking back, I've realized that it's the opposite. The phases I had clarity were very few and in between.

It was mostly the phases when I had found something that worked and I was skyrocketing. But that doesn't last long.

For the vast majority of the past 8 years, I've been lost. Which somehow makes me feel better now that I'm lost again.

Maybe this is normal. Maybe this is the life we have chosen.

Artists. Athletes. Entrepreneurs. The highest highs and lowest lows.

## **Broken dreams**

I was 18 years old when my country went bankrupt.

By the time I was back from university, all of the little businesses in my father's neighborhood were shut down.

The mini market across the street with the owner that dyed his hair but never admitted it. The blonde hairdresser that always gave me terrible haircuts until I decided to learn how to cut my own hair. The betting shop I never went to. And the coffee shop too.

All of them abandoned. Empty. With a lock and a chain on the door.

I didn't think anything of it back then. But when I started building my own products, I realized how sad it was.

Every one of those little businesses was someone's dream. Whether it was a small dream or a big dream, it doesn't matter.

They opened it with a vision. They were excited. Maybe they were spinning around in bed and couldn't sleep some nights. They designed the logo by hand on a piece of paper. And printed out business cards they were proud of. They put a few in their wallet. And stuck one on the fridge with a magnet.

They visualized the foot traffic. The customers coming and going. And day dreamt of success and becoming rich.

Sadly, that never happened.

## **Ship of Theseus**

I am also putting a chain and a lock on a huge part of CyberLeads, after 6 years of running the business.

I decided to call my father.

*"Tell me, how the fuck did you stay in business for 40 years. I can barely stay for 5. Is it because I'm in tech and every year is a dog year, with everything changing so fast?"*

My father's reply was instant.

*"Absolutely not. It's like that in every industry. In some industries, it might be faster. In other industries, it might be slower. But it's always the same story. Whoever stops adapting, ends up having the same fate as the dinosaurs."*

My first instinct was to challenge what my dad told me. After all, he was completely wrong about remote work and internet businesses.

And what does he know anyway. Talking about dinosaurs. He is a dinosaur too. Maybe he remembers them.

I didn't respond. I kept it. And went for a walk. But the more I thought about it, the more clear it became.

Nothing from my father's business in the 80s is the same.

Not a single inventory item. Not a single employee. Not a single supplier. Not a single client. Not a single desk or computer.

The only thing that has remained is the name of the company.

So has my father actually been running the same business for 40 years or not? Is it actually the same business or not?

And not just him. But every business. From the corner shops in my neighborhood, to the global giants. The DVD store became the computer repair shop. The travel agency went online. And Google is responding to the new AI environment. Everyone is adapting in one way or another. Otherwise, at some point, they die.

Maybe all these famous companies are not old companies, after all. Maybe they are just new companies with old names and logos.

Reminds me of the famous philosophical thought experiment called "The Ship of Theseus".

If you slowly replace every part of a boat, over many years, at what point is it no longer the same boat?

I have no idea.

### **Escape velocity**

I don't know why or how I arrived at this conclusion, but I always thought that I had to be successful just once.

All I have to do is reach escape velocity once in my life. And then enjoy being in orbit forever. Everything would be easier after reaching the stars. I would keep making money. And compound.

Find my one business. My one muse. My one CyberLeads. And then it's over. Keep running it for decades. Or even for less. Save a lot of money, sell it or just shut it down and retire.

I don't have to be an iPhone 17. I used to be an iPhone 1. Once upon a time, I was the best. And that should be enough. I made my money. And I have nothing left to prove. To others. Or me.

And for some people this may be true. Succeeding once may be enough.

They might be master captains, predicting and navigating perfectly every single wave. Or lucky enough to have been benefited by many waves in a row and not be destroyed by others.

But sadly it wasn't the case for me. I was wrong. Again.

Sure, I made my first million and changed my life forever. But in my mind I was on my way to retirement in my 30s. That didn't happen. And I cannot ride into the sunset yet.

I will have to find another CyberLeads again. And, who knows, it might take me another 20 tries.

Or I might never find it.

### **Floating in a history book**

A tough pill to swallow is the reality that I might have to work for all of my life.

Because plans are plans. And life is unpredictable.

Even if everything had gone according to plan, my retirement plans and calculations are extremely fragile.

First of all, everything is wrong if the US Empire falls. All my money and bets are on the US market.

But even beyond that. Even if nothing that extreme happens.

If inflation averages out at 3.2% instead of 3%. Then I'll need twice the amount of money to retire.

Finally, none of this will even matter if we have another world war.

As I'm editing this line, right now, this very second and moment, F16 fighter jets are flying over my head, intercepting missiles and drone strikes targeted at a military base 20km from my house in Cyprus. Friends of mine stuck in warzones. Everyone talking about WW3.

I used to admire people that lived through pandemics, world wars and dark ages. I used to think that they are tougher than us.

But now I realize that they were normal people. Like me and you. They just had no choice. They just had to adapt.

Personally, I would rather live a peaceful life. A life of abundance, culture and global peace. Not witness the Fall of Rome or the Collapse of the Bronze Age. Live through Dark Ages. Slavery. Famine. Or war.

But obviously I don't control what happens.

A global economic crisis and my country going bankrupt at 18. A global pandemic at 25. Possible World War 3 at 30. And who knows what's next.

I have to accept that I'm just floating in a sentence of a history book of the future. A school book of the future. A tiny chapter where the kids will be yawning and bored out of their brains, while the teacher tries to explain why the Early Silicon Age is interesting.

The only thing you can do is adapt. And remember that the only thing that cannot be taken away from you is your story.

Every asset you own can be seized. Every penny you made can be stolen. And every title or status can be stripped away.

### **Proud grandmother**

I'll never forget when I met one of the 4 founding fathers and inventors of the internet. One of the proudest days of my life.

It's one of those things that I'll remember it forever.

A client of mine, who had actually found me through these books, invited me to a special event in London. They were going to the House of Lords alongside some entrepreneurs, lords and one of the founding fathers of the internet. And after that they were going for a 2 hour private coffee. They offered to add me to the guest list.

I happened to be at my grandmother's house in London at the time. So it was perfect timing. And I accepted.

My grandmother couldn't believe it. I think I had to explain it to her at least a hundred times.

*"Entrepreneurs? House of Lords? Inventor of the Internet? Are you sure, Alex? Our family has nothing to do with these things."*

She was confused. But she was happy. She told me she was proud of me. And joked a few times that I probably got my brains from her.

She uses that joke a lot. It's one of her favorites.

She ironed my shirt and made sure I looked good in my suit. She made me promise that I'll take a good photo for her to frame.

### **Rock n' rolling forever**

During the coffee, I was pinching myself.

"Becoming an inventor was my biggest dream.. That's why I built Epilepsy Blocker and tried to make it my life's work..

Fast forward 5 years, I'm having coffee with one of the inventors of the internet. A technology so revolutionary that it's compared to antibiotics, the steam engine, the wheel and fire.

One of the greatest inventions and inventors of all time.

Man.. this is crazy. How is this real life."

He was truly inspiring. 82 years old. Still working. Still rock n' rolling. Still getting excited when talking about quantum physics, computer science, AI and climate change.

His eyes still sparking. Full of fire. Still moving his hands around when talking about things he's excited about.

That coffee changed my life forever. On the tube going back home, I wondered if I should stop obsessing over retiring young.

Maybe I will have to work for the rest of my life. And maybe that's better, anyway.

Maybe that's the goal. Not to retire young. But to love your job and life so much that you enjoy it every day.

To work by choice. To work on whatever you want. Whenever you want. However you want. With whoever you want.

To have that spark. Forever.

## **Writing the books**

I spent a full year writing these books.

Some were already written years ago and just needed brushing up. Others had to be written completely from scratch.

It has been one of the most fulfilling projects of my life.

I've decided to make them free. And, to be honest, I don't know why. I'm sure I could make some money by selling them and by doing a little bit of marketing.

But it's nice to do something that isn't for the money for a change.

Honestly, what is the point of making all this money if I can't take a little break to do something for the sake of it.

I just want to write. Freely. Whoever likes it, likes it. Whoever doesn't, doesn't. It's not that deep.

I could say that the opportunity cost of shutting down the service and not starting a new business for a full year is at least \$100,000.

But the reality is that I'm not a saint. I am not doing this for the people. I am doing this for me.

I am still getting paid. Just in different ways.

Tens of thousands of people have already downloaded and read these books, before they have even been completed or marketed.

Countless comments from people saying they are some of the most raw, real and authentic books they have ever read.

People that became millionaires and completely surpassed me, telling me that my blogs changed their lives when they started.

People that are just starting out and trapped in a job they hate, telling me that my books gave them a little hope and fuel.

Google employees and Cambridge researchers asking to work for me for free. Being invited to have coffee with one of the inventors of the internet. Being mentioned in books. And becoming part of a Cambridge research study.

I am human. And I have an ego. So these things feel good.

Being recognized, stopped on the street and thanked for the books.

My father calling me to tell me that he is proud to be my dad.

My mother's tears rolling down her cheeks, reading about how her dad impacted my life.

And my grandmother being my biggest fan even though she has no idea what I'm writing about.

New friends that get to meet me deeper. Old friends that get to fill in the gaps. Family members that get to see life through my own eyes. And myself being proud of my little story.

And probably so much more. Things I can't even see yet.

### **An old boxer**

I remember once seeing a 70 year old man in our gym. He was a friend of our coach that came to train with us.

When he started shadowboxing, everyone's eyes fell on him. He looked good. And a few seconds later, someone came to me and whispered that he used to be a pro fighter in his youth.

But he didn't have to tell me. I could see it. It was obvious.

He was still light on my his feet. Still turning his punches. Still making that tiny little pop in the shoulder and flick of the wrist at the end of his punches. Still moving his head. Still changing shapes and forms like water. And still stepping back like a cat, check hooking an

imaginary opponent and then moving out of the way. Fighting an imaginary opponent he has faced millions of times before.

It was magical to see. If you saw only his shadow you would think it's a pro fighter getting ready for a fight.

*"Goddamn.. look at him fly.. he's still got it.."*

I couldn't help but smile.

## **Fleeting vs Persistent Adaptations**

When I went home that evening, I started researching.

How is it possible for him to still move like this? Was he still training every week? Or was he shadowboxing at home every day?

Turns out, some adaptations are way more persistent than others. The body seems to keep some adaptations for a long time, while completely discarding other adaptations as soon as possible.

For example, motor skills. They are stored in the nervous system. They cost almost nothing to keep, so the body keeps them.

That's why we only need to learn to drive, swim or cycle once.

But other adaptations don't last for life.

For example, cardio is a very expensive adaptation to keep. The heart adaptations and extra hardware that the body creates, cost oxygen and energy to keep, maintain and repair. So as soon as the body feels like you don't need them anymore, it discards them.

It's an almost entirely fleeting adaptation.

That's why the old man couldn't train for the whole session with us. He got tired fast. Even though in his prime he probably could've gone multiple rounds with all of us back to back.

Finally, strength adaptations are somewhere in between. Muscle tissue is costly so when not needed the body discards it. But some of

the actual hardware adaptation within that muscle cell, for example the extra nuclei, stay there for decades, possibly for life. Again, because this doesn't cost much for the body to keep. That is what we call muscle memory. If you gain muscle once, then you can rebuild it a lot easier in the future.

At least, this is my understanding.

I have a feeling it's the same in business. Some things are fleeting and I will have to rebuild them from scratch. Like my idea generating muscle. My stress tolerance. Or my work ethic. I'm a lazy fuck now.

But other things, thankfully, are persistent.

My design, coding, marketing, hiring and management skills. My audience with tens of thousands of followers. My thousands of current and past customers I can sell to. My hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bank. And my intuition from all my years of experience.

Let's see if I can do this again.

## **Shotgun To Sniper**

So, I told myself when I first started writing these books that I can only have one framework. Well, here it is.

The updated "Shotgun to Sniper" framework.

Every framework I ever had broke. So I'm sure this will break too.

But, to be honest, I haven't been able to break it yet. Even though I have tried. A lot. I have only been able to extend and refine it.

Anyway, here it is.

### Idea phase:

The most difficult phase. The dark ages.

You start by shotgunning many products. If your product is not doing well, you cut it's head and move on. It's important you don't fall in love with ideas. You don't have time. You have to move fast.

Everything you do has a "next day version" or "next week version".

Personally, I used to do it all wrong. I used to start with a unique idea. Build it. Perfect it. Then look for people that may be interested. And finally try to reach them and build a channel.

But that never worked for me. What worked, and the way I found CyberLeads, was thinking of my distribution channel and market first, because those are the hardest to build in the current business environment, and then the actual idea. For CyberLeads, I actually copied someone for the first time and then put my twist to it.

What is hard is that in this phase is that there is no blueprint. And there are no recipes. You need to be an artist. Be creative. And think out of the box. Good luck.

The goal is to find a good product and a good channel.

Growth phase:

Ok, now you have your product. And a distribution channel too. A system to repeatedly get new traffic and customers.

Your product could be a SaaS. A newsletter. A service. Or consulting.

And your distribution could be posting memes on Twitter. Spamming people with cold email. Shaking your ass on TikTok. Or cracking jokes, buying drinks and slinging big deals at the local conferences.

It doesn't matter. You did it. You are out of the dark ages.

You now have to switch from artist mode to athlete mode. No more being creative and thinking out of the box. Now all you have to do is put the reps in. Do nothing new. And just ride that S curve.

The height of your S curve will be determined by your business genetics. The equation of business. How many people do you sign. How long do they stay. And how much do they pay you. On average. Over time. These can be improved by you, but are also heavily and external factors too.

You are growing fast and have complete clarity.

I love this phase.

Plateau phase:

Now this is where things get tricky. The S curve is almost over. And growth has almost completely stopped.

Now you have two options. A dilemma. Or as some people call it, "the innovator's dilemma".

Do we improve, optimize, and enjoy making money with what we already have? Or do we invent new stuff?

Both are valid. We can still make crazy money and grow by micro-optimizing what we already have.

If you can increase the number of people you sign every month, the amount of time they stay with you and the amount of money they pay you, all by 25%, then you have doubled the business. And if you can double them all, you 8X the business.

Of course, this sounds way easier than it really is. Especially as you climb up that S curve and hit diminishing returns.

But if the numbers are large enough, even tiny increases are worth it. For example, it was worth doubling CyberLeads from \$250k/year to \$500k/year by improving and optimizing everything.

But I don't think all that work would be worth it for doubling the newsletter from \$4k/month to \$8k/month. I think it was better to spend my time looking for a new S curve. Like I did. And found the service.

Basically, here is my simple stupid heuristic. Try to squeeze out more from the business if the numbers are large enough. But if you are truly stuck, respect business genetics and don't fight nature and diminishing returns. You can never beat nature.

Sure, sometimes it might be cyclical. A channel might work. Then because it works, everyone starts using it. Because everyone starts using it, it stops working. Because it stops working, people stop using. Because people stop using it, it starts working again.

So, it might be worth waiting it out for the next cycle. But keep in mind that it might take years for it to form.

And, if you're lucky, a wave might come, skyrocket you and give a new height to your S curve. Continue your random unique squiggly line.

But, usually, not only is that S curve not going to budge. But soon enough, it will start dropping too.

At least that's what happened me and CyberLeads.

And that's how I burnt out.

Optimizing and squeezing out the S curve:

Ok, let's say that we have rode up our S curve. And the numbers make sense, so we want to squeeze out more juice out of it.

The same way a pro boxer fighting for a world title will focus on the micro-optimizations because it's worth it. He will have a dedicated training camp, try to peak correctly, hire a nutritionist, a massage therapist and study tape.

Or the same way a Formula 1 team will fight to shave milliseconds off every pit stop, tire change, turn, and gear shift.

You are creating systems and automations. But you aren't really in the dark, thinking out of the box. You have clarity.

Basically, you split the business into 3 parts.

Front, middle and back. Marketing, sales and fulfillment.

You start by systematizing, productizing, delegating and automating stuff in fulfillment and product.

Then you have more time to focus on the revenue generating activities like sales and marketing.

And the goal is to improve everything so that we can close a few more customers and clients, keep them a little bit longer, pay us little more and convert a little easier.

Usually that's easiest done by systematizing, automating and delegating most things. And you are mostly doing the highest leverage activities that only you can do. In my case, that was marketing.

This phase is somewhat creative. But it's still in athlete mode. You get to build things. But they are mostly internal to help and improve the main business.

I love this phase too.

Unlocking new S curves:

Ok, let's say we have hit our plateau, squeezed out the extra juice and now we truly hit nature's diminishing returns.

You could either just coast and enjoy life. Like I did, for years. But I'm not sure I recommend that for that long. Because, it turns out, nothing good lasts forever. Just look at me now.

At some point, you have to start searching for a new S curve again.

Sadly, athlete mode is over. It's time for artist mode again. There is no clarity. And we need to think out of the box again.

There are three places I look for new levers of growth.

The first is marketing. Running marketing experiments to build a new channel or grow an existing channel, so that we can increase the number of customers we sign each month.

The second is product or service. Running experiments and building new features to increase the amount of time customers stay with us.

And the third is pricing. Simply experimenting with the price, or coming up with new offers so that people can pay us more.

These three influence the 3 levers of the equation of business.

Anecdotally, I have found that improving the product in order to keep them longer is hard. Building new channels is the hardest. And making people pay more is by far the easiest and most effective lever to pull. That's how I grew.

I went from charging \$5/month with GitGardener. To charging \$300/month with the CyberLeads newsletter. To charging \$3k/month with the CyberLeads service. That's a 600X increase in price.

And my revenue went from \$100/month to \$50,000/month. That's a 500X increase. Pretty interesting correlation.

I think it's how most companies grow, actually. Over time, they go enterprise and swim upstream to make the big money from the big whales.

As a result, they up space for other startups to come and focus on the little fish they are neglecting.

And the ecosystem keeps going.

The framework:

Ok, sorry for all that theory. But now we have all the ingredients. It's actually super simple.

This is the whole framework.

- Shotgun many products until you find a successful one

- Sniper on that product until you hit the S curve plateau
- If it's worth it, stay sniper on the product to squeeze out more juice by micro-optimizing
- Otherwise, shotgun many new experiments within that product until you find the next lever of growth
- Rinse and repeat forever

### Caveats:

Of course, a lot of this is theoretical. Rinse and repeat forever is obviously not always possible.

You cannot keep squeezing 20% growth out of the business after you hit diminishing returns. And maybe you cannot keep finding new levers of growth within your business forever either.

Maybe at some point you should create a new business. This is something I was terrified to admit.

I wanted CyberLeads to be my golden ticket. And I never wanted to go back to the terrifying dark ages.

But I will have to. I will have to create a new business again. Come up with a new album. Something fresh.

Either within CyberLeads, as a new offer. Or outside of CyberLeads, but to the same customer base and my audience. Or a completely new business altogether. Maybe something with AI.

At least that is my own strategy for the year. But even this strategy is loose. I haven't really decided what I'm going to do.

The more I try to come up with frameworks, the more I realize they don't exist. There are no frameworks. And there is no spoon.

Just learn by doing. Adjust your behavior over time. And when you're stuck, do the exact opposite of what you're doing.

Basic adaptive intelligence. Real intelligence is actions. Not words.  
Just do shit.

## **A museum in Milan**

When I first moved to Milan, I promised to myself that every weekend I would go out and visit a new place.

On my first week there, I went to see the Duomo and walk around.  
On my second week there, I went to a little museum next to it.

I remember they had a small collection of paintings by the Futurists.

I walked in and out of that museum in 15 minutes. I didn't like it. And completely forgot about it.

Years later, I randomly read their manifesto. It's called "Futurist Manifesto" and it was published in Milan in 1909, so more than one hundred years ago.

Milan was changing. Trains. Cars. Watches. Newspapers. Factories. Smoke. And stress. The industrial revolution had arrived.

Society was changing too. Culture went "event first" to "clock first". People changed. Instead of saying "I will see you when I wake up", they started saying "I will come see you at 9am".

Initially, I thought that they would be opposed to this change. And that their paintings were their message against it.

But it was actually the opposite. They were embracing change. And they wanted to accelerate this industrial movement.

If you have read so far into these books, you know that I love, romanticize and cherish the past.

But, at the same time, I also love this mentality. Why not embrace change. It's equally as beautiful. And it's unavoidable.

Everything we love and cherish today was once upon a time brand new. It was the latest and greatest technology. And it was controversial.

Something I find interesting is that Socrates was against writing. He believed that it would destroy human memory because we would write everything down. According to him, books do not contain real wisdom, because they cannot talk back, respond to criticism or defend their position. And he famously never wrote a single word.

Everything we have of him is from his student, Plato.

### **Just build**

When I was growing up, I felt like I was at the end of civilization.

This is it, ladies and gentlemen. The end of time. It doesn't get better than this. So enjoy it while it lasts.

But the more I study history, the more I understand that we are actually in the beginning of history.

If we assume that multiple people have lived back to back for 100 years each, Augustus' Rome was 20 people ago. And entire history is 60 people ago. That's not that long.

If you added all of your ancestors, your dad, your dad's dad and so on up until the time of Ceasar, they would not even fill a small bar.

And if you live a full long life, you will have lived for around 2% of recorded written history.

So here we are, ladies and gentlemen. The beginning of history. Let's get to work. And let's build the future.

It doesn't matter what your intentions are.

Technologies built with good intentions ended up being catastrophic. And technologies built with evil intentions have ended up saving lives and making the world a better place.

Alchemists tried turning metal into gold for their personal benefit. They ended up accelerating science and medicine. The Chinese invented gunpowder while looking for the elixir of immortality. It caused millions of deaths.

It also doesn't matter what your expectations are.

Many technologies were built with the highest expectations and went nowhere. And many technologies were built with the lowest expectations and changed the world.

The early internet was used by universities to exchange files. Today the whole world is online. The first AI use cases were characters in games. Today it's used to detect and cure cancer.

World War Two rockets became Saturn V that took us to the moon. And plastic surgery was initially for war victims.

This was eye opening for me. And very difficult to admit. After all, I always wanted to make the world a better place.

But you cannot predict how a technology will be used.

So maybe just build. And invent. Anything. For whatever reason.

## **Appendix**

The writing is done. And my sabbatical is over.

1 year. 100,000 words. Half a million characters. And 13 books.

To be honest, I wanted them to be 12. Like one of the greatest poems of all time, Virgil's Aeneid.

But life is never perfect. And I'm not Virgil. So who cares.

What's important is that I am refreshed. And ready to work again.

I never thought I would say this. But I miss working. I miss being productive. I miss making money. And I miss being a winner.

I miss it all.

## **Stupid conversations**

It's noon. And I'm at the cafe.

Taking a little break. Sitting outside, in the sun, looking at the trees, the sea, and the people walking by.

My sister is calling me. I haven't spoken to her for a while.

I pick up the phone. And within 10 seconds we're laughing like idiots.

We either repeat the same old stories and inside jokes from 20 years ago. Or invent new nonsense on the spot.

*"So what have you been up to?"*

*"Writing. Just finished Book 13. The final book of MY MASTERPIECE!"*

*"The masterpiece! Oh Alex, how many things are you going to teach us mortal humans. Don't teach us so much. Keep something for yourself. We don't deserve all this wisdom and knowledge. Thirteen books? You've even surpassed even the 12 gods of Olympus now? And Virgil? Be careful, you might even surpass dad."*

Then it was time to make fun of my sister. Something about work and a date she went on. Within a few minutes, our ribs were hurting from laughing.

*"So what are you doing later?"*

*"Going to play beach volleyball with some friends. Some old friends from high school who also live here. And some new friends I made at the cafe."*

*"The cafe! The place where Alex hunts for women all day!"*

*"Ok, Eva. Enough. I'm exhausted."*

*"Ok, enough. Are you happy?"*

*"Crazy happy."*

*"I love you. And I'm proud of you."*

*"Me too."*

## **Closing the chapter**

The next day, I went to the cafe and told everyone that I had finished the book.

They smiled. Laughed. Clapped. And congratulated me.

I told the owner that I will print the book and leave it on the shelf. And many people have requested a copy from me.

We took a photo all together. And celebrated.

Finally, this chapter of my life is complete. It's over.

After I went home that evening, it hit me.

*"I guess I'm done.. I did it.."*

A very familiar cocktail and blend of feelings. It's not clean.

A small high. Followed by a tiny bit of fulfillment and pride. Followed by a little feeling of emptiness.

I felt it after my last fight. I felt it after I made my first million. And I felt it now, after finishing my last book.

It's ok. I think this is how it's supposed to feel. It's supposed to be a slow burn of fulfillment. Not a spike of happiness.

Enjoy it. And cherish it.

But it's time to move on.

## **What's next**

Honestly? I don't know.

I'll take a few days off. But then I need to get going again.

I need to make money again. And I need to build a new business.

Last month was actually the first month I lost money.

I feel broke. And I don't like this.

I open my laptop and find my file with all of my business ideas.

I need to pick one and start working again.

Let's see what happens.

### **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.

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

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Constantly updating this list.