the minimalist business



introduction & fundamentals



the introduction to the introduction

Hello, and welcome to *The Minimalist Business*. My name is Naomi Dunford, and I am your host for this journey. My pronouns are she/her and they/them, I'm a Pisces with Aries rising, and my favorite food is Brie cheese.

Before we commence with the hilarious content - not to mention the teacups - let's get you oriented, shall we?

The Minimalist Business is a training program divided into 5 main sections, or modules. This is the introductory module, in which we discuss fundamentals, key concepts, and get you set up for a successful journey. After this introductory module, there will be four main modules for the course, each devoted to one of the areas we're going to minimize. Then, at the end, there are bonuses for specific situations and circumstances.

I'll give you a quick overview of what we're going to cover in this module.

First, we're going to talk about where we are (also known as maximalist hell) and how we got here (by accident, mostly - oops!) I'm going to introduce you to our super, mega resource that we lovingly call TEA, because that's its name. We're going to touch on who benefits from a minimalist business approach. I'll introduce you to the four levers - those things we're going to be minimizing over our time together. Then I'll take a little time to paint you a picture of what you're going to get when you strategically minimize - a glimpse of the business you're transitioning to.

Then we're going to talk about the three beliefs or mindsets that we're going to need to shift for our minds and hearts to move to a minimalist model. And last, I'll give you a little exercise. We're going to do some TEA triage, identifying which of the resources is most necessary for you right now, and how to get your hands on some more of it, even just for right now.

You ready? Let's do this.

hi. welcome to a new beginning.



I'm going to go out on a limb here and guess a little bit about your situation.

You're in business, or you want to be in business, or you are *technically* in business but you haven't exactly been doing a lot of business stuff lately.

You either have a lack of time, or you have plenty of time but you're absolutely mortified at how you're using it.

You don't know what's wrong with you but you just can't seem to pay attention anymore. You're wondering if it might be ADHD. (If you have ADHD, you're wondering if it's getting worse.)

Whether you have a functioning business or not, you are very, very, *very* overwhelmed, overloaded, and probably also unsure about what you should be doing. That overwhelm-overload-confusion cocktail causes panic, distraction, and sometimes both.



Welcome to internet solopreneurship in the 21st century. We can work from anywhere, robots answer our emails for us, and instead of eating grapes by the pool or gradually becoming the wealthiest person we know, we're all a hot mess.

What happened? I'll tell you what happened.

Business got too complicated.

Yes, there was a pandemic. Yes, there has been a scuffle or two on the global political scene. Yes, Uranus is in Taurus. Yes, there's that war, and that other war, and…

But we all know this has been happening for a long time now. The "I think I might have ADHD" emails didn't start arriving somewhere in mid-2021. "I think it might be burnout" is not exactly a recent observation for many. All of the dramas on the world stage are not only creating problems - they're also revealing problems that have been able to hide for a long time.

The truth is, business used to be different. There was a playbook for business. No, it wasn't perfect, and no, it wasn't a guarantee. But most reasonably motivated people could do what the books and blogs said and hold their own.

Somewhere along the line, though, I started noticing a shift. Perhaps you've noticed it, too. For me, I realized that the questions people asked me started changing, first slowly, and then very quickly indeed.

I used to get new clients in my office wondering how to make more money, or get a bigger mailing list, or get a book deal. People wanted to know how to grow a larger audience, or earn more, or expand their reach. The focus was on growth.

But the culture of business has changed.

These days, people are asking how on earth they're supposed to get it all done.

Now, I'm autistic. I tend to take things literally, often too literally. Over the years I've conditioned myself to ignore the literal meaning of most sentences and replace them with the cultural maxims that they usually are. I'd been generally assuming that this question was really "I have a lot to do and that overwhelms me." So I've tried to help as best as I can.

But as more and more cracks in our systems have been revealed, and patterns have started to emerge and crystallize, I started to look at that question differently. What if it means exactly what it says? What if it really is a literal question?

What if people are honestly asking how on earth they're supposed to get it ALL done?

All of it.

All of the things.

"All of the things need to be done, and that's clearly impossible, so what do I do?"

This, I think, is where the wheels fell off the bus.

it is my contention that the culture of business has inadvertently become maximalist.

Let's play a metaphor game. I want you to imagine you're planning a wedding.

(Fellow literal types: "wedding" = "business".)

For a long time, weddings were really simple affairs. You wore your best dress, he borrowed his brother's suit, the whole thing's done by noon. You're planning a wedding today, and you're not an idiot - you understand it's a little more complicated than that these days. But you think it's going to be fun. It'll be wonderful. It will be a beautiful day to celebrate your love.

How do we show love? With research! (OK, maybe that's just me.)

Anyway, here you are, in wedding planning land. You're on a Pinterest board and you see, I don't know, locally sourced, eco-friendly flowers that restore the regional bee population or something. And you're like, those are awesome! And you're absolutely right. They are, in fact, awesome.

Then you read an article saying a thoughtfully chosen bridesmaid gift will be cherished forever. And of course, that's true. Thinking does tend to beat not thinking in the, uh, thoughtfulness department.

You see something about new trends in cakes, and those are very cool.

You see something about brides wearing funky sneakers under their dress, and that seems like a fun way to save $300 and two weeks of blisters.

You hear about audio guestbooks. And digital RSVPs. And midnight popcorn bars. And it's all very *cool* and *good* and *full of possibility*.

But somewhere along the way, something unpleasant happens. Things take a dark turn.

Your brain overflows.

You overload.

Your circuits fry.

What was a *cool idea* becomes *necessary for wedding survival*.

What was a *neat possibility* becomes *vital to a functional wedding*.

What was an *option* becomes a *mandate*.

Soon enough you're in a Facebook group full of strangers screaming: "Weddings aren't like they used to be! Now you have to have custom bridesmaid gifts and savory cakes and purple Chuck Taylors and a retro phone and popcorn. AND NOW THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT SAVING THE BEES?!? This is impossible!" And then you collapse in rage or defeat.



This is a trick of the brain. It's not you… you're not gullible or naive or unreasonable. It's not The Man trying to take all your hard-earned money. We can't even really blame the marketers for this one.

It's a natural function of having 400,000 more reference points than the brain was designed for.

See, back in 1962, if you were a nice young lady living in Soda Springs, Idaho, there really wasn't a whole lot going on in the local wedding scene. There were a few Jones' to keep up with, sure. But on the whole

you got married at the church, you held your reception at the Rotary Club, and there really wasn't much more to it than that.

By 1992, some things had changed. Now, there were *wedding magazines*. A bunch of fancy city folk flooded your head with ideas of all the beautiful things you could have. It was an explosion in possibilities… but it was a *contained* explosion. You could only see what Madison Avenue paid for you to see, and the magazine was only so long.

But sometime between the invention of the Snackwell cookie and Will Smith slapping Chris Rock, *things got a little out of hand*.

By 2022, you could see every photograph of every wedding every Bridezilla ever had. Even if you didn't go looking for them, they came to you with helpful Buzzfeed articles like:

> *21 Brilliant Wedding Ideas That Are Adorably Original And Incredibly Clever*
>
> *23 Wedding Details That Are A Little Bit Extra And A Lot Brilliant*
>
> *31 Impossibly Fun Wedding Ideas*

… and just in case you're not scared or overwhelmed enough:

> *Looking Back, These Are The 34 Ways People Would Totally Redo Their Weddings*

(By the way, I looked at these articles so you don't have to. You'll be happy to know that you can have your wedding bouquet turned into dice, you can get your bridal party *matching tracksuits* as an alternative to *matching robes*, and there's a tutorial for how to make mini tissue boxes. I also submit for your consideration: renting a wedding bouncy castle, hiring llamas for photo opportunities, or riding up to your reception on a unicorn jet ski. All these ideas and more can be yours… on the internet.)

So, do you see what I'm saying here? How maybe once we get to the llamas, we start losing our minds a little bit?

Well, the thing about business is that it's noticeably longer than a wedding (even one that extends all the way to a waffle buffet brunch the next morning.) You don't just do it once. You do it, and you keep doing it, and you keep doing it, ideally for a really long time. *The bouncy castles and the unicorns just keep coming*.

And over time, all of the cool ideas for business, and important things to remember about business, and the awesome opportunities in business… it starts to make you a little bit crazy.

And then you're in a Facebook group, screaming business isn't what it used to be, and you're muttering something about llamas.

This is a weakness in the brain's ability to sort. We were not designed to see 400,000 ideas and studiously, rationally, selectively choose from among them. We were designed to see, like, a fish in a pond and think, "That might be a cool thing to have for lunch." That's about as far as our primitive brains' decision making was supposed to go.

So all the cool things - the "all" we talk about when we wonder how we're supposed to get it "all" done - it's an illusion.

They are all good things, sure. But there was never a memo that said you had to have or be or do those things.

Our brain just got overloaded, and filled that part in on its own. Like this:

Good idea = good idea.

Good idea + good idea = good ideas.

Good idea + good idea + good idea = many good ideas.

> Good idea + good idea + good idea + good idea = OH MY GOD! HOW DO I DO IT ALL? I AM SO OVERWHELMED! WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE!

If we apply this to business, it looks something like this: (Feel free to substitute my examples with whatever's blowing up your brain this week)

> Social media outreach = good idea.
>
> Social media outreach + bundling offerings = good ideas.
>
> Social media outreach + bundling offerings + nurture sequence = many good ideas.
>
> Social media outreach + bundling offerings + nurture sequence + contact management = OH MY GOD! HOW DO I DO IT ALL? I AM SO OVERWHELMED! WE ARE ALL GOING TO DIE!

Sigh. Brains.

I'm here as the bearer of good news.

You don't have to have all those things.

You can't do all those things.

You're not supposed to do all those things.

I don't do all those things. If I have bundles, I'm not aware of them, although it's possible Kris set them up. I don't even have social media, let alone use it for direct outreach. I've taught and trained email marketing for over 15 years and I don't have a welcome sequence! (Although, yeah - I should probably get one of those.)

You can run a perfectly profitable, reasonably enjoyable, sustainable business without doing all the things.

You just need to choose your things.

Now, how do we choose those things?



Alright, I should probably tell you about the tea thing or this cup's going to crack.

introducing TEA

TEA is the first key concept in your minimalist business journey.

You are in this situation, reading this page, considering this change, because you want or need more of at least one of the three big limited resources.

The limited resources are: Time, Energy and Attention.



No matter who you are, what you do, or why you do it, one thread binds us all: the universal need for Time, Energy, and Attention (TEA). Regardless of what the news says, this trio of resources is not, in fact, a luxury - it's an essential component of our daily lives. TEA - both its quality and its quantity - impacts every single part of our lives, from personal well-being to professional success to whether we remember to buy body wash.

Time – The Elusive Commodity:



Time – The Elusive Commodity: News flash - time is that one resource you just can't get more of. If you don’t have time, it doesn’t matter what else you have. You can have all the money and earnest and obsequious assistants and custom AI scripts you want - if you don’t have time to use them, well, you’re out of luck.

You can always make more money. You might be able to hack energy and attention. But time? When it's gone, it's gone, and they’re not printing more. That's why in minimalist solopreneurship (also, life) valuing and managing your time is not a nice-to-have. You need more time, and you need to be happy with how you spent it.

Energy – The Driving Force:



Energy is your inner fuel. It's what keeps you going, Knocking out tasks? Dreaming up new ideas? Pushing through boring admin work? All of these things need energy. In an ideal world, for us to function with ease, energy needs to be the right amount, the right type, and reasonably predictable. (You may have noticed that this is not an ideal world.)

Energy is often what we lose first when we’re burned out, distracted, or pulled in all directions. We’re tired, we’re wired, or we’re both. Minimalist business models work with our energy, and are calibrated to who we are as business owners. We’re not (all) Silicon Valley coke fiends, and minimalist business allows us to work with our rhythms, not try to turn ourselves into something we’re not.

Attention – The Focused Lens:



Attention is your spotlight, shining on what matters most at any given moment. In the world of online business, calls on our attention (also known as distractions) are like that scene in Harry Potter when he's getting pelted by a thousand flying keys that also happen to be hummingbirds. (While riding a broom.)

Managing attention is not about avoiding social media or "it's been three minutes since I checked my email" compulsions. It's about truly being present in what you're doing so you can actually, you know, do it. Whether you're deep-diving into a project or planning your networking strategy, where you direct your attention defines your journey. Minimalist solopreneurship is about cutting through the noise, focusing on what's essential, and giving it exactly what it needs. Otherwise you spend the rest of your life being pelted by key birds, and you don't even get a cool broom.

TEA is vital.

TEA is limited.

The minimalist business framework is about maximizing your TEA so you can do more of what matters, and burn the rest in a garbage fire.

who benefits most from a minimalist business approach

"Scarcity captures the mind... The mind orients automatically, powerfully, toward unfulfilled needs."

from Scarcity: Why Having Too Little Means So Much

So, who can benefit from transitioning to a minimalist style of business? Well, I'm biased, so I think everyone can benefit. "You know what I need, more bells and whistles to manage" said no-one ever. But there are some people for whom a minimalist business is particularly valuable. These are the use cases we're going to be speaking to primarily throughout this program. See which ones apply to you. (If you get five in a row, you can yell "BINGO!")

Let's explore who stands to gain the most from this approach.

People with ADHD:

The structured simplicity of a minimalist business can be a game-changer for those with ADHD. As we have a tendency towards hyper-focus and distractibility, eliminating non-essential tasks and distractions helps maintain focus on high-impact activities, reduces overwhelm, and makes doing things more possible. (Plus, if there's less to do, there's less to forget.)

Side Hustlers:

Juggling a day job with a side business requires strategic management of sometimes very limited TEA. It takes creativity to make it work, and you can't be creative if you're a wasted shell. Plus, when you get home from the day job, or wake up on a weekend, it's really helpful to know

what you're supposed to be doing, rather than thinking about it from scratch every time. A minimalist business approach helps side hustlers optimize their efforts, ensuring that business doesn't hijack day job, day job doesn't hijack business, and there's time for a movie every now and again. (I recommend The Holdovers. I know it's a Christmas movie. It's also an awesome movie.)

Autistic folks:

For autistic entrepreneurs, minimalism moves beyond benefit and into necessity. The need for monotropism – the sustained focus on a single task – means that a business model that minimizes task switching significantly reduces the risk of autistic burnout and meltdown. Plus, we tend to like rules and routines. A minimalist business owner decides what rules they're going to follow, and makes a routine out of them. So it's kinda perfect.

Burnout survivors:

One of the reasons it's so hard to come back from burnout - occupational or neurological - is because what you're coming back to is what burned you out in the first place. Bazinga!

If you're going to come back at all, you're probably going to have to make business very different to even consider it. A minimalist business is modular, and can be slowly built up over time. (If this is you, make sure to check out the Kaizen guide in the bonus section.)

Caregivers / Special Needs Families:

If you have caregiving responsibilities or you're part of a special needs family, your TEA constraints are probably unique and somewhat immovable. ("Use the first 90 minutes of your day!" and "Do this one thing EVERY DAY" can both go eat a rock.) Minimalism in business allows for containment and productivity in a way that brings TEA conflicts down, gets stress to manageable levels, and enhances quality

of life. If you have people who need your care, you can still have a profitable business - you just need to be strategic and flexible about it.

Digital Nomads:

If you're working and traveling, the flexibility and mobility of your lifestyle demand a business model that's as agile as you are. You can't carry fourteen extra suitcases, and neither can your business. You probably have a minimalist bent in your personal life - this process extends that to your business as well. A minimalist approach provides the efficiency and portability necessary for success on the move. (I can't help you with the wifi, though.)

Individuals with Chronic Pain or Illness:

I have news for you. When you have chronic pain and illness, sometimes you can't work. Sometimes you can only work for a bit. Sometimes you can work on one kind of thing but not another kind of thing. Sometimes you think you can work but you can't. And on it goes. Managing a business with chronic pain or illness requires an approach that accommodates fluctuating energy levels and physical capabilities. Minimalism means there's less you have to do, which means there's an outside chance you might be able to do it. (I know, right?)

Anticapitalists:

Anticapitalists see minimalist solopreneurship as an act of resistance. This business model rebels against the model of solopreneurship that's really just corporate grinding in a fancy hat, and prioritizes sustainability, dedication, and ethics. Minimalist business challenges the narrative of endless growth, focusing on creating value through simplicity and mindfulness. For anticapitalists, a minimalist business is a statement that success can align with values, benefiting the community and the planet, proving that less can be more (and usually is).

People Seeking ACTUAL Work-Life Balance:

For those embracing the "work to live, not live to work" philosophy, minimalist solopreneurship is pretty much the only option. (I know it's a radical opinion, but you can't have balance if all you do is work.) This approach allows for a truly balanced lifestyle, where work is one food in the buffet and not the main course. Minimalist business owners focus on essentials, freeing up time for quirky retro stuff like personal pursuits and family. This model is about designing a business that supports life goals, not overshadows or postpones them.

OK. So you're a burned out, anticapitalist, ADHD side-hustler with a busted shoulder, nine special needs grandparents, and you live on a boat. You have determined that a minimalist business is right for you. How are we going to do it?



our 4 points of leverage

I don't know if you've ever tried lifestyle minimalism - as in, owning way fewer physical things - but if you have, you'll perhaps have noticed something.

Not all *things* are created equal.

They're not all the same size. They're not stored in the same places or the same ways. They're not the same maintenance level. They don't have the same expectations, pressures, or emotional entanglements. They simply don't have the same impact on our lives.

Owning fewer dishes has a different impact than owning fewer pens. Owning fewer books has a different impact than owning fewer bookshelves. Ditching your pool has a different impact than ditching your dishwasher.

But it's not just true across categories. It's true within an individual category as well. Owning fewer dress pants has a different effect on our lives than owning fewer casual pants. We simply live differently when we have 10 pairs of yoga pants and one pair of slacks than we do with 10 pairs of slacks and one pair of yoga pants. Our lives will be visibly and noticeably different depending on *how many of what kinds of pants we own*. We choose different activities. We go to different places. Sometimes we even think different thoughts.

If it's true with pants, go ahead and assume it's true with business.

In a minimalist business, all complications are not created equal. Not everything we do has the same impact - mentally, physically, or financially. Like in lifestyle minimalism, it's true between categories and it's true within categories as well.

> Example of cross-category: Dropping a newsletter you write has a very different impact than dropping a newsletter you read.
>
> Example of within-category: Ditching 500 inactive social accounts you follow may make very little impact to your TEA. Ditching the three accounts that distract you from your mission and make you feel like crap about yourself will probably be transformative.

The framework around which *The Minimalist Business* is built is simple: There are four categories of business activities that have the highest impact when reduced, streamlined, or contained. They represent our greatest points of leverage, which is why we're calling them levers. As we embark on our journey towards business minimalism, these will be the areas we focus on to achieve our greatest gains. Like a graphic equalizer, we will work towards finding our perfect balance, turning these four dials way back from maximalist hell to just right.

As I've done this work - on myself, and with others - I have discovered that, of all the things we do, these four categories are the ones that have the greatest impact on our TEA. There are other things we do, certainly, but they don't have the creep, the drain, the overwhelm, the confusion, or the dread of these four.

Here's an example: For the first *Write a Book with Me*, I made gemstone talismans, by hand, for all of the students. Almost everybody had slightly different gemstone choices, which meant I made individual reference sheets explaining their stones. I organized everybody's addresses, packed the envelopes, addressed them to over 20 countries, and took them to the post office by myself. (I'll add here that I do not drive.) None of that was a problem. I loved it. It was fun.

Finding pictures for my blog after the rebrand, though? My life force oozed out of my pores. I legitimately missed working at the pub where, it should be mentioned, *I was roofied at work*.

So, without further ado, let's talk levers. As discussed, there are four.

The first lever is connection, the way we connect with our fellow humans.

Robin Dunbar is an evolutionary psychologist and biological anthropologist. (Say that four times fast.) He has proposed that there is a cognitive limit to the number of meaningful, stable connections we can have. (He posits it's around 150.) Beyond Dunbar's number, things start destabilizing. This seems instinctively true. We intuitively grasp that we can't know and have real relationships with everybody. The current business climate tries to forget that in favor of more, more, more, but the truth is, in general, less is far more effective and profitable.

In a minimalist business, we focus on mindful, generous, mutually beneficial relationships, and we connect in ways that matter and feel good, not in ways that drain our TEA.

The next lever is the way we make content.

Between content *fatigue* on the audience side and content *shock* on the creator side, the content situation has gotten out of control. They're exhausted, we're exhausted, and yet, for many solopreneurs, content marketing is literally the only way we know how to market. (And that's not even counting the content that isn't marketing, but is in fact, the product itself. *Ai ai ai*.)

People used to flock to content marketing because it was free, as in, it didn't cost the money resource. I used to ask people to consider

spending $100 a month on ads and they'd look at me like I'd suggested they use caviar as a foot cream. But 100 hours a month on making content? Well, that's just TEA! So it's free, right?

Yeah, that's bad. We're going to fix content before it eats us alive.

The next lever is the way we handle administrative tasks.

It is possible that for people who do not own businesses that the only certain things in life are death and taxes. Once you have a business, though, that changes irrevocably. Now, there is administration and many would argue it's the worst of the three.

We cannot avoid administration, but we can contain it to something manageable. Admin will creep and creep and creep until it invades every nook and cranny of our lives, siphoning our TEA like a hungry ghost. The minimalist business keeps admin in a box of just the right size, freeing up crucial resources for things that perhaps matter a little more than *reading the email that says you paid your website hosting*.

Our last lever is the way we promote our offerings.

This one is my favorite because for most people, this is the most freeing lever of them all. Promotion is where the majority of our money gets made and counterintuitively can take the least amount of our TEA. Unlike human connection, unlike content creation, unlike administrative tasks, promotion can be almost fully templated and automated. It can be - and for most solopreneurs should be - nearly turnkey.

I don't know what the last thing you bought was, but I'm willing to bet you did so as a result of a promotion that was almost entirely done by template and on a schedule. Easy, meet peasy.

As we go through the next four modules, we'll be diving deep into each of the levers, maximizing your points of leverage to radically simplify your business in a way that keeps your TEA - and your money. Let's talk about that for a bit.

what are the benefits?

OK. So. Maximalism bad, minimalism good. But how good? What kind of good?

Now.

It's all very lovely to say "oh my gosh we need to make things simple, yes, that will be so much better". But you know how it goes. We try to simplify and then we let a teeny, tiny, harmless little something in. And then another one. And then another one. And all of a sudden, things aren't quite as simple and minimal as they used to be. Cue: weeping. (This is why *The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up* sold 13 million copies, and 14 million of them are currently in landfills, storage units, and used bookstores.)

So let's take a look at the benefits you're going to get when you move the four levers and truly embrace a life of getting your damn tea back.

Increased Focus and Clarity:

> A minimalist approach cuts through the noise and clutter of traditional business practices. You won't have to sort so much, consider so much, Google so much. You'll make clearer business decisions with a more focused strategy. (Those things are, incidentally, faster, which means you will get more done. Possibly a lot more.) This clarity streamlines your workflow, yes, but it also brings a sense of purpose and direction to your daily activities. Getting up in the morning is easier.

Enhanced Creativity and Quality:

By removing unnecessary tasks and distractions, you create space for innovation and quality. This focused attention allows you to pour your energy into what you do best, enhancing both the creativity and the caliber of your work. If you only have one real thing to do today, the chances are you can probably do it pretty well. That's not just objective "quality", either - you have time to be inventive, interesting, and unique. (FYI, those are good for business.)

Reduced Stress and Overwhelm:

Simplifying your business operations means less juggling and fewer balls to drop. None of us got into this business because we were utterly incapable of juggling, but let's face it - juggling three balls is a lot easier than juggling 12. This reduction in complexity leads to lower stress levels, meaning you start operating from a place of calm and control.

Better Time Management:

Embracing minimalism helps you to use your time more effectively. With fewer, more meaningful tasks on your plate, you can manage your time better, leading to a more productive and satisfying workday. This means you get more done, have more fun / downtime, or both. (It also means you can enjoy your downtime rather than spending it beating yourself up about today and dreading tomorrow.)

Financial Efficiency:

In business as in life, maximalism is spectacularly expensive. A new weird knick knack here, an annual subscription to a business service you'll never use there - maximalism is self-inflicted financial hemorrhaging. A streamlined business is a more cost-effective one. By focusing on essential tasks and resources, you reduce

unnecessary (often absurd) expenses, leading to improved financial health and either a higher salary or reduced need to work. (If you don't have to pay it, you don't have to earn it. Bazinga.)

Increased Resilience and Adaptability:

A simpler business model is easier to adjust and adapt. Agility is no longer a character strength these days, but a survival skill. Agility allows you to respond swiftly to market changes or personal circumstances, maintaining your business's momentum even in turbulent times. You can see customer trends and adapt to them. You can make a mistake and recover from it. You're not locked in by your own business or past decisions.

Personal Satisfaction and Fulfillment:

Let's face it - you started this business because you liked something about it. (You did, right? If you didn't, call me immediately.) After all that dreaming and fantasizing and planning something that was supposed to be awesome, it's disheartening to spend 92% of your work hours maintaining, wandering, running on a treadmill and/or panicking. Running a nice, simple business that aligns with your values and goals brings immense personal satisfaction - it brings us back to what we were doing all this for. A minimalist approach ensures your business activities resonate with your personal ethos, meaning you're less likely to, you know, hate it.

Other benefits are sustainable growth, deeper customer engagement, enhanced work life balance, and a remarkably lowered chance that you will ruin your marriage because you were working too hard on stupid things that didn't need to be there in the first place. (Wait, maybe that was just me. My bad.) Also, you're less likely to have a heart attack, ulcer, or another autoimmune disease, so that's cool.

Shall we move on?



Oh, right! Then there's the money thing.

Now, when you're hemorrhaging tea, losing tea, leaking tea, and pouring tea out of every available window, it is easy to focus on just that. The needs for more time, more energy, and more attention are very real.

But let's not forget that we're in business here. You're not running an NGO. The objective is still profit. And here's where it starts getting really good.

In the world of solopreneurship, there's a counterintuitive yet powerful truth: by doing less (if it's the right less) you almost always earn more.

We should probably talk about that.

As solopreneurs, our professional lives often become cluttered with non-essential tasks. Bloat, distractions, fear, FOMO, and a constant cycle of consuming, thinking, and overthinking - it takes our time, depletes our energy, and scatters our attention.

But when we shift our focus to what's genuinely essential, efficient, and elegant in our businesses, a remarkable transformation begins.

By stripping away the superfluous, you get your TEA back, and TEA is a strategic advantage. With more TEA at your disposal, every aspect of your business begins to thrive:

- You go to write a sales page and you have the time, because you're not rushed or pulled in 19 directions. You have the energy to do client avatar exercises. You have the attention to craft your message well. What happens? Would you look at that! Your sales page is converting better… *because of course it is*.

- You're on a call with a prospect. You're fully present, you're paying attention you're mindful and you're engaged. You start to get legitimately excited about the possibility of working with them, and you have a warm, transparent sales conversation, not a stressed out template-based one. You offer them a custom package, something a little out of the ordinary for you. They feel your authenticity and your understanding, and they buy… *because of course they do*.

- Your existing clients feel the difference. You're not just responding, you're leading. You're thinking about them while you're out for a walk, thinking of how best to serve. You're actually taking them somewhere, because you have the time and energy and attention to do so. *Of course they re-up*… you're giving them what they didn't even know they needed.

- You stop phoning it in on email marketing. You can focus when you write, and as such, your writing is automatically targeted to exactly what your subscribers are looking for. You're not exhausted and relying on cliches and copycat techniques - you're showing up and making something just for them. *Of course they're going to want more*.

And so more TEA, doesn't just get you more TEA. It gets you more money.

three mindset shifts

In order to run a minimalist business, there are three main mindset shifts, or beliefs, that we must change in order to make the transformation. But first, a joke:

Two gas company servicemen, a senior training supervisor, and a young trainee, were out checking meters in a suburban neighborhood. They parked their truck at the end of the alley and worked their way to the other end. At the last house, a woman watched the two men from her kitchen window as they checked her gas meter.

When they had finished the meter check, the senior supervisor challenged his younger co-worker to a foot race back to the truck to prove that an older guy could outrun a younger one. The co-worker accepted the challenge. As they approached the truck in full stride, the two men realized that the lady from the kitchen window was huffing and puffing right behind them. They stopped in their tracks and asked the woman why she was running behind them.

Gasping for breath, she replied, "I'm not stupid... when I see two gas men running that fast, I figure I'd better run too!"

You can slow down.

Like the woman running after the men from the gas company, most of us are not running consciously. We haven't really chosen it. We're running because everyone else is running, because we think we have to.

If we really put our critical thinking hats on, we know that this idea of having to be everywhere, and do everything, is unnatural. We know that the people we truly admire and connect with are doing one or two things, and doing them well. It's intuitive. Of course the people who slow down and focus and stick to what they're good at succeed. There is no parable in the Bible in which the guy who ran around like a hyper chicken

got all the harems and all the figs. Our wisest minds know that mindful, sustained focus is the only way anything of consequence gets done.

But the constant fray and stimulation of this industry has sent us into survival mode.

It took me a long time to trust that I could slow down, and mostly I had to learn it via experimentation and empirical evidence. I had to try to make an entire cup of tea before I got on the phone with a client, rather than skipping the sugar because "I didn't have time". I had to learn to turn on the computer and edit a newsletter in peace without cramming it in on my phone while I was waiting for Jack's toast to pop. These are lessons we have to learn on our own, but it's a lot easier to learn them when we've committed to doing it. So that's our first belief shift - it's okay to slow down.

You can trust yourself.

In times of uncertainty, ambiguity, change - or simply being new at something - we crave the wisdom of mentors. This is natural and wise. When we look back to our prehistoric ancestors, you best believe if we ran into a sticky situation, we looked to our elders to guide us and give us behavior to model. This was a really good idea when we lived in a tribe of 47 people. It's what kept our ancestors alive long enough to ultimately make us.

But, like with the weddings and the llamas, now there are a thousand mentors advising 10,000 things. It is no longer simple or practical to just do "good things" or follow "best practices". There are simply too many of them. We now have to curate our best practices into not only "good", but "good for us".

The next mindset shift, then, is that you can trust yourself to know what's a good fit for you. You can trust that voice that says some technique is too aggressive or low on substance or a flash in the pan. Your intuition

will be wrong sometimes (intuition can look a lot like fear and bias) but it'll be right far more often than that.

If you think you might have a knack for writing, you probably do. If you think it's time to drop a certain social site and put your effort into another, you're probably onto something. It's natural to want guidance, but a big shift in your evolution will be when you're truly comfortable trusting your own instincts.

You can decide.

The Latin for "decide" is *decidere*. It means "to cut off" - to cut off options, possibilities, out clauses. When we learn to decide, life becomes much easier and simpler.

If you're familiar with Marie Kondo's Konmari method, this is the key premise to her method. When she has you go through clothes first - *every* shirt, *every* pair of socks, *every* scarf - then books, and papers, on and on… she says she does it so you will learn to trust your decisions. That's why we keep that shirt with the hole. That's why we keep that newsletter subscription. And that's why we keep Twitter when we haven't used it more than twice a year in this decade. It's hard to cut things off, so we don't.

A huge part of our TEA drain is that so many things are left in holding patterns. We have inactive social accounts that we haven't dropped, but we haven't updated - it's weighing on us. That software we're keeping in case we do those videos, but it's in limbo - it's weighing on us. All these little maybes come from a place of indecision, and that indecision puts a massive strain on our systems. Like a computer with way too many programs on in the background, or a browser window with too many tabs, these undecideds drag us into cognitive exhaustion.

So the last big shift is learning that you're capable of deciding. It's learning to be comfortable taking the risk of deciding on things. When

we clear things out of our possibilities - when we cut them off - we experience clarity. Things are not clearer - they're clear. And what do we get when we have true clarity? We get our time back, we get our energy back, and we get our attention back.

TEA triage

OK, as we get ready to move on to our levers, I have a teeny tiny piece of homework for you. We're going to take a look at your time, your energy, and your attention, and see what you need the most.

Instinctively, we know which part of our TEA is our lynchpin, the one that's stopping us from laying our hands on the others. We have a felt sense of what we're lacking, what we're leaking, and what we crave.

For some of us, it's time. We have energy, and we have attention, but if there's no time to use that energy or attention, well, it doesn't really matter, does it? For others, it's energy - oh, we've got all the time in the world, and we could pay attention at the Olympic level. But our get up and go got up and went, and we watch our time float by, unused. For some, it's attention. The time is there. The energy is there. If we could just focus on the thing we're supposed to be focusing on, we'd be billionaires. Sigh.

So we're going to look at where your biggest TEA gap is, and see what we can start doing about it.

My client, Kate, has three kids, two with special needs,

I asked her, in the leadup to making this class, "If you had more time, could you actually use it? Like, if I canceled all your meetings this afternoon, would you be able to put the time to good use?"

"Oh my god, yes!" she said. And then she listed all the things she'd do with more time. I clarified with her, just to make sure, "OK, but practically speaking, do you imagine you'd be alert enough? Would you be able to sit still and do those things?"

She was like, "You're damn right I could."

Perfect. In Kate's case, then, **her main bottleneck is time.**

She needs to do whatever she can, now, to carve out a little more time and decide in advance how she's going to use it. If all she can scare up is an extra 15 minutes, that's fine. We have to start somewhere.

But her job is to look at her schedule - and her not-schedule - and see where she can give herself a little more time and then use it for something conscious.

She can do this on the day level - she can look at this calendar day, this one right now, and see where she can scare up 15 minutes. Maybe that's not calling her mother. Maybe it's getting takeout. Maybe it's upping the kids' screen time a little bit on the condition they only interrupt her if someone is bleeding profusely.

The other way she can do this is on a more macro level. Can someone take on one *recurring* task? (Not "do the dishes tonight" but "do the dishes from now on".) Can some standard drop a little (maybe no hand wash clothes for the foreseeable future)? Can some chore be done biweekly instead of weekly? Can she drop a commitment? Can she combine tasks and do something while she's in the carpool lane?

Remember, these are not long-term strategies. Long-term, we're going to get her to the point where she doesn't need to do these things.

But right now, Kate has a time bottleneck and the way to clear it up is to clear it up, even if only a little, and even if temporarily.

Let's look at energy.

My client, Andrew, is in a different boat. By any definition, he has time. He is very organized. His calendar is a work of art. He does certain activities in certain windows, other activities in other windows, and lists. Lots of lists. All the lists.

The problem is, when it comes time to do one of the things on one of those lists, he just can't even. He's exhausted at the soul level. (Probably at the body level, too. And the brain level - he's a knowledge worker and effectively thinks for a living. It takes it out of a person.)

If I gave him a bonus afternoon, like I gave Kate, he'd probably have to try not to cry or hit something in frustration. Look, a big beautiful stretch of time that he can't use because he doesn't have the energy.

Now, energy is fundamentally different from time. You don't find it. You create it, or you capitalize on it, or you grab it and run with it. But you can't just look to your energy calendar and cancel a commitment and bam, you're good to go.

Andrew needs to find some triage-style ways to create more energy, or appropriately capitalize on the limited energy he already has. Some ways to build on energy:

- chemically. Caffeine is not a life plan, but used sparingly and strategically, it can make a pretty good 15-30 minutes plan. If green tea or green juice gives him a boost that he can use to do something that's important to him, without having problematic downline effects, then that's a good short-term strategy.

- Sensory. Smells and sounds can activate energetic parts in us. If we're really exhausted - mentally, physically, or emotionally - it's not going to turn us into Captain America. But orange oil and Duran Duran might get us where we need to go for long enough to get that email written.

- Association. Maybe you feel motivated after you watch *Extraordinary Attorney Woo*. Maybe pictures of your grandkids get you jazzed. Maybe having an incentive gives you a little burst. Maybe having your current work up and available and open and in progress means you don't have to expend energy getting started because it's already there. So there may be ways you can sneak some energy in by association.

- Reducing known energy drains. If Andrew is particularly burned out after making breakfast, the time after breakfast is time he can't use. So keeping a detective's eye out for things that are particularly draining, and preventing or curtailing those things, can make the difference between "doing the thing" and "not doing the thing". Preparing breakfast the night before, or eating a simpler breakfast, could give him a little bit of energy back in the mornings. Remember, we're only looking for a little bit here.

Of course, there are long-term, sustainable ways to build energy as well. Sleep hygiene! Omega-3s! Removing toxic people! Therapy! These are all good things, and you should apply your subconscious mind to things that might help in this arena. But triage is about seeing if we can grab anything at all, right now. So if you're an energy person, peek for ways you can snatch a little bit back, just for now.

Let's look at our last part of TEA, attention. This one is mine. I'll give you a little glimpse into my world circa Christmas.

So, I moved last December. Why I decided to move at the end of December is something I will never really know. But I did, and it was ridiculous. But it wasn't the kind of ridiculous you think it was. You'd think it would be chaos. You'd think I'd be running around like a hyper puppy. You'd be reasonable to assume that, but you'd be wrong.

See, you may have heard that I'm a minimalist. I've lived in a converted (and therefore furnished and decorated) AirBNB for four years. I don't

actually own stuff except in a few categories. (Board games and the kitchen are my addictions.) A motivated person could pack up my entire home in a day and have plenty of time to binge *Queen Charlotte* and get a pizza.

I, however, took the entire month of December and still moved out four days late. Why?

Because every time I looked at my basically empty bookshelf to put the 12-or-so items in a box, I got so unfocused and scattered that I turned away to look at my desk. Which would make me unfocused and scattered, then I'd look to the kitchen island. Then the mud room. Then back to the desk. I spent entire days not packing literally anything because every time I physically moved towards what needed packing, I got so scattered that I turned away from it and looked at something else.

I had time. I had energy. But I could not bring myself to look at one thing and do it.

Solutions for attention problems tend to involve some kind of forced necessity or containment. I body doubled with my client Sarah - she edited her sales page and I packed board games. I had my ex come over and stand there waiting to bring boxes to the car as I packed them. I dropped my standards to zero and shoved everything not-breakable into baskets at random. I used reverse pomodoros. I used the Forest app so many times I ended up with enough credits to buy three trees. I listened to a lot of binaural beats.

Eventually, I got it done. (Then, when I got to my new place, I donated three quarters of my remaining possessions to ensure this never happens again.)

If you're an attention person, you need to remember, record, and commit to the things that have worked for you in the past to get you to sit still and do the thing. (Or not sit still and do the thing, if that's your jam. Who knows, maybe you're better at dictating your emails while you take a

walk. You do you.) Attention, like the other resources, does not need to come in a flood. You don't need to permanently solve this situation today. (Who are we kidding? We wouldn't have the attention to stick to it that long!) It's about doing whatever it takes to get just enough attention to do one thing that's important to you.

In the field of attention, in particular, it can be helpful to start small. First, all jokes aside, it's often too difficult to pay attention to more than that. But second, attention gains tend to stack. If you can pay attention for four minutes today, the odds are pretty good you can pay attention for five minutes tomorrow. So starting teeny is actually a really good start for attention issues.

in closing...

As we move further into the course, we'll be looking at high leverage ways to clear entire swaths of stuff out of your business, which will give you huge, eventually transformative gains. But you'll need enough TEA to even think about those things, let alone put them into practice. So your teeny tiny homework, before we meet again, is to find what resource you need the most and find some of it, even in the smallest amounts.

Thank you for spending your TEA with me today. I'll be back soon, and we'll talk about connection. Until then, take great care of you. You're on an awesome journey, and I'm very proud of you.