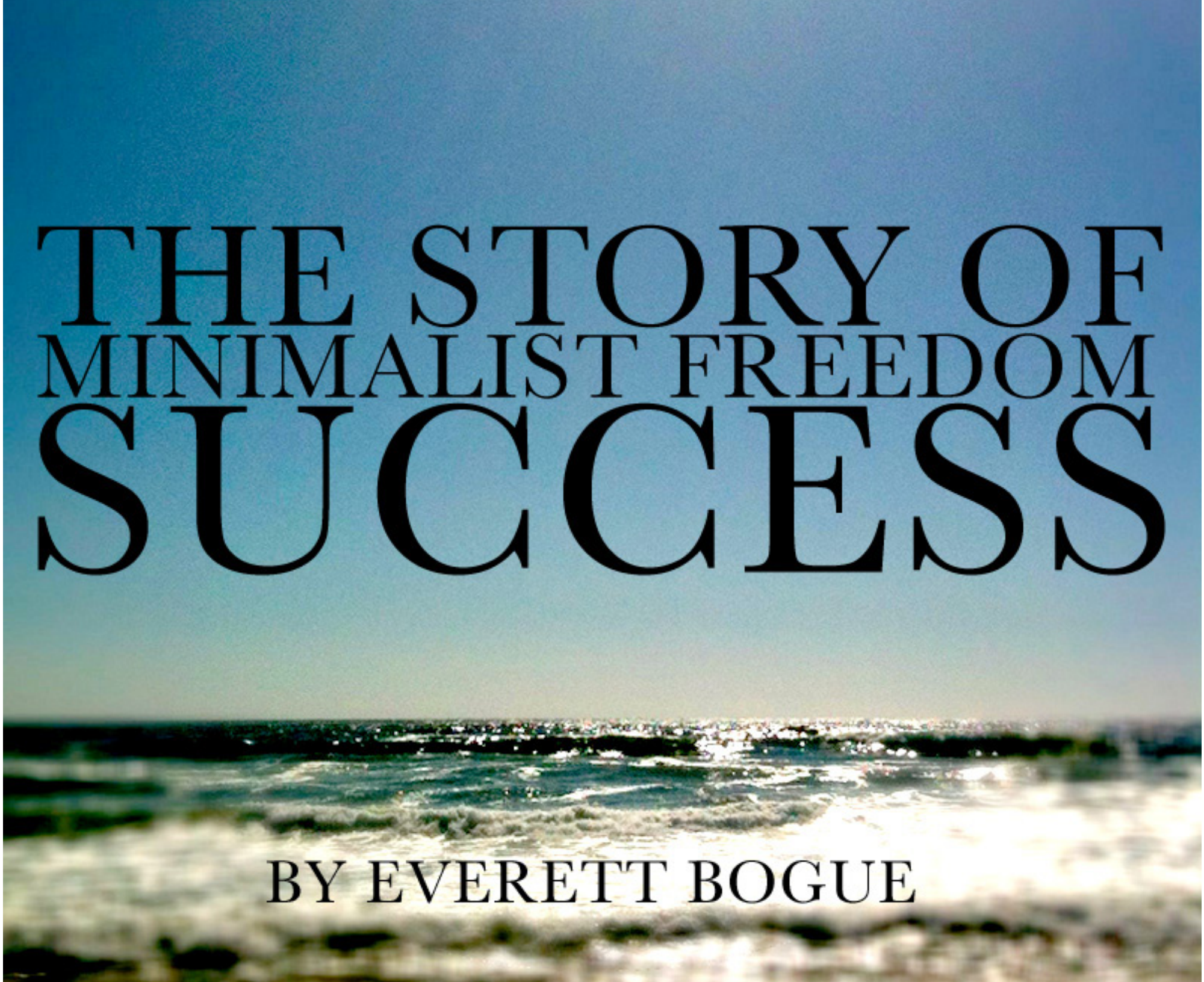

THE STORY OF
MINIMALIST FREEDOM
SUCCESS
BY EVERETT BOGUE

EVERYONE HAS A STORY

Every single successful person who has discovered minimalist freedom has a story to tell. Whether they came from a bright past or harbored a dark passenger, the result is the same. In order to do great things, you have to make hard choices.

The question has always been, what choices do you make?

How do you figure out where to focus your life in order to build a minimalist freedom business that makes you a significant automated living online? How do you decide which stuff to NOT do with your business, instead of focusing on what to keep yourself busy with?

I'm writing this nearly six months after the initial launch of Minimalist Business (Oct-Nov 2010). I've learned a lot over these past few months. Some difficult decisions panned out, and others died isolated deaths.

These next pages are dedicated to what I and others learned about success over the last six months. The final chapter is about The Void, the limbo area that's so easy to slip into when the struggle ends.

I hope these pages can help you.

I've grouped these pages into individual lessons of Minimalist Business Success stories. They deal with the decisive elements that I've determined bring about a really successful simple business with no overhead. Yes, these elements won't be for everybody, and as always, some of you will fail —but the right kind of failure is good, as will be illustrated below.

I only ask that you read these pages thoroughly. Study them with your full attention, and without distraction. These next pages are not to be taken lightly. Turn off your music, turn off your cell phone, turn off whatever. You cannot learn anything if you don't decide to shut everything else out and focus on one subject.

The same goes with Minimalist Business. If you've read it before, I suggest reading it again. The moment has come to revisit the teachings and let them soak in one more time.

If you liked this exploration into minimalist business success, I'd love if you could send it on to a friend of yours that needs to learn more about this subject. They'll be eternally grateful, and you know that I will be also.

THE DECISIVE ELEMENTS

THE PATH TO SUCCESS

The entire world will tell you to plan, but they're wrong. The best plans set into stone will change a thousand times before you reach your destination. This is why I'd like to encourage you to instead walk the path towards creating a minimalist business.

What is a path? A path is a way that changes often, it follows your whims and it also includes stepping over obstacles. We're used to driving on roads that don't change, but a business doesn't work within the constrains of pavement. Instead of driving in a straight line towards a goal, you need to learn to step lightly, quietly, and avoid pitfalls and other obstacles.

A path has all of the benefits of a plan, but none of the solidarity.

When they teach you to write a business plan, and then tell you to think it out in advance, they're wrong. Instead, write a business path and start walking to your destination. Do one thing every day until you're starting to generate an income from your minimalist business. This is the path, and you're walking on it every day.

Minimalist freedom expert Colin Wright, the author of *Networking Awesomely*, doesn't plan - he jumps. Whether it's skydiving in New Zealand or letting his blog readers vote on the next continent that he moves to next, there isn't much foresight need. The path is ahead of him, and he walks it.

FAILURE IS AN OPTION

I've received hundreds of emails from minimalist business owners over the last six months, and universally one of the largest problems they've had is the inability to fail.

In order to succeed you need to fail more often. You can't sit around waiting to win the lottery. Every magic success story you've read about came about after someone kept failing and failing and failing over and over again until they found the 'magic bullet.'

People will forget every single time you've failed, and you will forget too. I can't even remember how many business ideas I tried before I ended up with the idea to write about being minimalist on a blog.

The simple fact is that dwelling on failure isn't worth your time. Instead of focusing on the fact that you failed, move on as fast as possible. If something isn't working, kill it as soon as you know for certain that it won't succeed.

How do you know? If you're walking the path you will know. Trust yourself when an idea is flopping, and acknowledge that it won't succeed.

When you're trying multiple plans of attack, in most cases one of them will win.

When Adam Baker of Man Vs Debt launched his latest project, *Sell Your Crap*, it bombed right out of the gate. His site crashed, all of his guest posts went up at the wrong times, and he cried.

The truth was that this wasn't a failure though - it was just a failure of expectation. Later that month Baker's book ended up grossing thousands of dollars. The truth is that with a few tweaks and a little experimentation, he was able to turn his failure around into a success. Without acknowledging his mistakes, he never would have pushed through.

THE PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Your work is a practice. This means that it's an on-going situation that you perfect every day. In order to improve a practice, you have to work on it every day.

I learned about the practice from yoga. The idea behind yoga is you're working towards perfection every single day on the mat. You'll never be perfect, you're going to be yourself. The idea isn't to reach perfection and then start working - that doesn't work. Instead, work towards perfection every single day.

Your minimalist business is your practice. Every day you wake up, and bring your work to the world. It doesn't matter if you aren't doing it right, but you will in time. In the beginning you're going to suck at everything, and fail at everything. But if you don't show up to do the work every single day for at least an hour, you're not going to improve yourself.

When you find the practice that means something to you, you'll continue to work at it day after day without tiring. In fact, the practice itself will give you the energy that you need to sustain the practice until you reach success. Your work becomes a perpetual motion machine that both fuels and propels your success forward.

If you aren't feeling the energy powering your work, then maybe you need to go back a section and fail. Try something else; in time you'll discover what makes you catch on fire.

There are two things that I do every day. 1. I practice yoga. 2. I write something. Maybe that doesn't involve hitting the publish button, but it does mean that I make some sort of headway in a constructive or productive way.

THE POWER OF ZERO-OVERHEAD

I spoke about the zero-overhead strategy at length in Minimalist Business, but I have to stress it one more time. You can't discover your practice, you can't fail often, you can't discover what will be successful if you're spending tons of money when you don't actually have any.

This includes money that has been given to you. It's common practice to aspire to be a venture funded company —which rarely happens, it's like playing the lottery. Don't aspire to take someone else's money. When you take someone's money, your ass (and your work) belongs to them. There is no pressure that can compare to rapidly spending someone else's money. Just don't do it.

A minimalist business has zero-overhead, and thus is one of the most flexible business models that you can execute. Our digital age of cloud-living super-structures allows this model to flourish. We're no longer looking at a zero-sum competition game where the person who spends the most money wins, and everyone else loses. Everyone wins for everyone.

Keeping your overhead at zero is easy. Don't rent an office. Don't buy software you don't need. Give yourself permission to do your work without hiring expensive consultants or paying a team of people to do your work for you.

Do it yourself by not doing things that aren't important. If it costs money, chances are you don't need it.

You already have everything you need to start a minimalist business: you.

Tyler Tervooren of Advanced Riskology doesn't need much to survive. His life-overhead is an estimated $14,000 a year. Then how come he can skydive, climb mountains, and generally take outrageous risks with his life and his business? Because his priority is on his life, not how much he spends on stuff. No-overhead is "the secret", if you don't get it now I don't know how you will.

COMPETING FOR POWER

The old world existed within a system of checks and balances. Every pair of Nikes sold meant one pair of Rebooks didn't.

Minimalist businesses don't work this way. There is no endless power struggle to see who can take the most buyers away from someone else. It is no longer a zero-sum game in a marketplace as diverse as this.

This means that the most successful people aren't afraid to support the work of others. The more you give, the more you shall receive. On the Internet this works best by linking vigorously to the work of others, either through blog posts or via social media outlets like Twitter and Facebook.

If you're trying to get the attention and affection of someone who has a larger audience of potential people, don't ask for their attention. Attention is a valuable resource, and burning it is the worst thing you can possibly do. Instead, use the gift of sharing to show that you appreciate the work of another.

If you really want an A-List blogger to retweet your stuff, why not retweet their work every single time they post for two weeks? This shows that you care. Emailing these people just wastes their time and inevitably ends up with them becoming incredibly annoyed with you.

I know it sounds counter-intuitive, and that you've been told to fight for attention. However, you don't have to fight if you give the gift of sharing to the people whom you wish paid attention to your work.

Have no expectations; simply share the work that you really enjoyed. Gift culture is the single most effective strategy for building your audience.

At some point Leo Babauta, the author of *A Simple Guide to a Minimalist Life* and blogger at Zen Habits realized that this wasn't a zero-sum game. We're all in this together. And in order to build his zen blogging empire, he'd have to teach up-and-coming bloggers the skills they needed to succeed. Did it work? Well, Leo has 200,000 subscribers on his blog now —something must be working.

THE UNION OF MASTERS

A minimalist business doesn't exist in a vacuum. In order to grow a minimalist business you need to establish a network of peers who will support and grow your minimalist business.

I did this early on by interviewing every single minimalist business owner I could find. I asked them tough questions about how they were able to achieve success in order to learn how I could achieve success myself.

There's a double-bonus of interviewing successful people: when you do a good interview with someone, one that contributes value to both them and yourself, you have a good chance of establishing a connection with that individual on a personal level.

The best way to do this is actually to NOT aim too high with the interviews. It's tempting to try and interview super-famous people in an attempt to 'get as high up as possible.' The problem with famous people is that there are usually thousands of people competing for their attention.

Aim lower, interview people who are playing the game just a little bit higher than you and learn from them. If you're running a 500 subscriber blog for your minimalist business, interview a couple of people who are running 1000 subscriber blogs and so on. Then, build up from there.

We live in an age where everyone is their own media channel. This means anyone can create work that matters and bring it to the world. There's no need to concentrate on the people at the tip-top of the pyramid. Instead, look to those who are a little bit ahead of you and leverage from there.

In August of 2010 Tammy Strobel's (the author of *Smalltopia*) blog Rowdy Kittens exploded. Yes, she was featured in The New York Times, but that wasn't the only reason. You see, Tammy has a built-in strategy that revolves around the network of masters. How? She simply runs a blog post once a week that links out to stories that she read and liked. So simple, so effective.

IGNORE ANYBODY

The world is filled with people who don't know anything about anything, but they all think they do.

The minute you start a project, especially in this age when the Internet breaks down all boundaries, you'll find that they all come out of the woodwork with the intention of showing you how to do it right.

The problem is that they have no idea how to do it right, unless they've done it themselves. Criticism is the least valuable commodity in the world because everyone has the ability to be a pretty damn good critic.

So what does this mean? Turn them all off. All great work is created in solitude. That's why I'm writing this with my Internet off using Writeroom to blank out the world. I'm not going to run these ideas by a peer group to make sure that all of the ideas sit well with everyone.

When you create something that makes everyone happy, you end up making a work that doesn't change a thing.

Jonathan Mead, the co-author of *Dojo* and author of *Reclaim Your Dreams*, has a mantra that I think everyone should aspire to. At the top of his blog is the line: Don't Read This Blog if You Want to Be Ordinary. What does this mean? People who want to be average need not apply. This keeps him focused on supporting the work of awesome people, and he can forget about boring people. I dig it, because it works.

MONEY AS ENERGY

In order to have a truly successful minimalist business, you need to stop thinking about money as pieces of paper. Yes, I know that money is paper, but it's not just paper.

The reality of the situation is that money really is the result of using your energy to bring value to the people. You do this by helping people via applying your energy with concrete plans until money comes back to you.

A lot of people are overwhelmed by the guilt of making money. They think that if they're going to be making money, it must be at the expense of other people. This is far from the truth.

The truth is that if you help people through your knowledge to better their lives, you deserve to have money come your way in order to sustain your lifestyle. When you help people learn, they will benefit as well.

The monetary success of my first e-book, *The Art of Being Minimalist*, is simply because the book contributed such incredible value to the people it helped. This happened because I applied my energy in order to create a great work that would help a certain group of people achieve minimalist success.

When you apply your energy to help other people, and you do it in a way that creates value, the natural reaction from the environment around you is to support you with money. You only need to give people a way to support you in order for the money to come to you.

Do this by applying energy to create a product that contributes value.

No one really knows how much money Chris Guillebeau, the author of such amazing resources as *The Unconventional Guide to Working for Yourself* and the epic *Empire Builder Kit*, makes. But rest assured that it's a lot.

How does he do it? By investing energy in his work. When his print book *The Art of Non-Conformity* came out, he didn't opt to simply visit one bookstore in New York on tour. Instead, he decided to visit every single state in the US and every territory in Canada. No easy feat right? Well, it's worth it if the energy you put into your work comes back as money.

THE START OF THE ART

For any of this to work, you actually need to start somewhere. Starting is never perfect. In fact, 100% of the time when you start doing something you're going to really suck at it in an unbelievable way.

You can't stop sucking at starting something if you never start doing it. When you first do yoga you have a way of falling over all of the time, this is okay! You need to fall in order to find the place where you don't fall. You have to fail to find the place where you cannot fail.

How to start producing work that matters: start. The advice is the same whether you're creating a written work, a video work, an audio recording, a software product, or whatever. You need to begin with an introductory iteration and move from there. A great way to do this is to create a blog and start creating something a few times a week.

I created dozens of blogs before Far Beyond The Stars achieved escape velocity. For first blog that I had (in high school), I wrote about girls. The second blog I also had in high school, I also wrote about girls. Then I created one in college, and I wrote about how to survive college.

There were other blogs, but I forget what they were about. The point is that no one cared about those blogs, but the moment I started one that actually mattered, it took off. Why? Because I had the courage to start and fail and start and fail in so many ways before I ended up in a place where everything started to happen.

THE SEARCH FOR MAGIC BULLETS

Have you ever noticed that the poorest people always insist on playing the lottery? That's because they don't understand the odds of making money while not working very hard.

I have a friend who insists she's going to make it big one day by stumbling upon some simple magic bullet scheme that will make her rich and famous. The thing is, she never actually attempts strategies to find out if they are magic after all.

She isn't alone, I've received hundreds of emails from people wanting to know the 'secrets of internet marketing success'. There are no secrets, and searching for them is a waste of time.

Minimalist businesses are built by spending an hour a day working on a strategy until it actually begins to work. Maybe this means failing over and over again, that's okay. The simple truth is that you can't win if you don't try things.

...you can't try things unless you actually try things.

So stop searching for the next get rich scheme, it isn't out there. The only way to achieve success is to actively pursue a goal by putting solid plans into action with faith in the inevitable results.

THE POWER OF SHIPPING

Nothing gets done unless you finish it. How do you finish things? You have to set a ship-by date and ship something when it arrives. This isn't an original idea (no ideas really are original), I lifted it from a brilliant guy named Seth Godin who's written over 12 books. You should read them.

Shipping is the act of taking something and making it public. The brilliant thing about the Internet age is that shipping is easier than ever, and it's completely free. I ship at least once a week on my blog, I do this by writing a blog post and then I hit the publish button. Sometimes my blog posts fail, other times they go wildly viral.

I wouldn't know if they failed or if they were viral material unless I actually published them.

So many novice artists and wannabe creatives hold back their best work because they fear failure. I've known 50 year old artists who've been sitting on their best idea for three decades just because they're so terrified that someone will reject their work.

Here's the thing, if you create anything that means anything someone somewhere will reject it. You can't win the battle of trying to impress everybody. Instead, try to impress a few people who really believe in you.

They say you only need 1,000 true fans to be a success story. I know this is true, because I found them, and it worked.

FAITH IN YOUR WORK

Finally, everything comes down to having the ability to believe that something will work eventually. Belief is a skill, like so many others. You have to practice believing in yourself in order to develop the ability to actually do it.

This means setting skepticism and self-criticism aside for long enough to actually make work that matters.

It's so incredibly easy to cross over into a world where doubt and discontent dominate every action you take. I know, I've been there. I know you have too.

I've also seen dozens of minimalist business launches fail because there was no element of belief involved in its execution.

If you don't believe in what you're doing, either don't do it or find a way to believe in it.

What's the easiest way to believe? Work towards something that actually matters. If you're hell bent on cheating people or making the world a worse place, chances are you might end up in a world where you can't escape the negativity.

But you can escape it. I know you can because all of the emotions that I listed above are simply mindsets. If you put yourself into a mindset where pain and suffering exist, you put yourself into a mindset where failure and criticism exist.

If you avoid these places, you can succeed. Anything is possible, all you have to do is try harder and smile under pressure.

TRUE NATURE

Your success depends largely on how much you embrace your true nature.

Think about how many times in your life you've tried to pretend that you're someone whom you're not. Perhaps you tried to impress a girl by seeming cooler than you actually are, or like you have more money to spend on dinner than you actually do. Did it ever work out? Maybe for a little bit, but in the end everyone always figures out that you're fronting.

The same goes for business success. If creating work around the topic of deforestation doesn't make you jump out of bed in the morning, then maybe you shouldn't be talking about trees all of the time.

If you're trying to sell cars, but don't actually own one, maybe you should try a new profession.

How do you figure out your true nature? Well, that's the hard part. The journey of self-discovery is a long one. You have to continually probe yourself, your mind, your internal spiritual drive in order to get to a point where you're embracing your true nature.

Then, and only then, do you get to that point where you're actually embracing your edge, where you're seeing the true you, and you're there. For a moment... and then everything changes again.

The only option is to continually pursue the truth about yourself and the work that you're meant to do. Only then will you continue to live in the successful plane of existence.

TOMORROW MAY NEVER COME

My current mantra is simple: Smile, embrace everything, and dance like it's the end of the world.

Have you ever watched the Stanford University commencement speech given by Steve Jobs, How to Live Before You Die? Well, go watch it. The biggest take away is that every morning Steve gets up and says to himself "you'll probably die tomorrow, you'd better make this day worth it."

The reason for this is simple, and yet so many people miss the point. They waste days, they waste hours, they sit around being unhappy in a job they don't like because they don't have the courage to make the change necessary to make their life successful.

I'm going to take a moment and break down my personal mantra very simply:

1. SMILE

Any situation has to the possibility of sucking, but there's no reason to get down about it. You see, if you smile everything has the possibility of being just a little bit more awesome. So, I walk through life smiling at everyone, enjoying life, and generally being happy.

Smiling has a way of making you happier just by taking the action of actually doing it. It doesn't matter if you're actually not having a cheery day, smile anyway.

2. EMBRACE EVERYTHING

Humans have a way of anticipating every single situation before it happens. The problem with this is you end up planning for 5,000+ contingencies instead of taking each moment as it comes.

One of the underlying purposes of studying yoga, buddhism, and meditation is that you learn that all of that planning-ahead-junk in your head is ultimately useless. All situations will unfold as they will unfold, and no amount of trying to game the system ahead of time will make them work out better.

So we get to embrace everything. This means if things happen, go with them. The flow of the river is ultimately traveling out to sea, and kicking and screaming won't keep you from the eventuality of ending up there. The thing is, maybe you actually wanted to go in the direction that the world is taking you.

This doesn't mean that you let people walk all over you. It just means that instead of reacting before every situation, you react as every situation unfolds.

The biggest benefit of this whole mindset is eventually you get to a place where unexpected adventures are allowed to happen. You run into someone on the street, they invite you to the park, and you end up seven hours later wondering just how many amazing things could happen in one day. All of this just because you smiled.

Yes, these things do happen -- and much easier when you're open to possibilities.

Open heart, open mind, open body.

3. DANCE LIKE IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD

If you've ever been to an incredible dance party, you know that when the combination of the music, the people, the lights, the energy in the space are all right, you can keep dancing until the sun comes up the next morning. All of this happens simply because of the intrinsic power of the interaction among elements. Then you throw up, go home, and pass out for two days.

You need to choose to embrace this energy in your life at all times.

Say to yourself: "if this was the last action that I take, if I was going to be hit by a bus tomorrow, how would I approach this work?" Probably with as much powerful creative energy as possible.

You would not have to worry about the repercussions anymore, because you'll be dead tomorrow.

Well, here's the thing. You're going to be dead tomorrow if you don't do what you feel like you need to do right now in this moment. Every moment that you waste worrying about how people will think about you if you're brave enough to create something that actually matters is a moment that you're slowly dying in.

So don't worry about what people think. Don't worry about what will happen tomorrow if you create something today. Don't worry about every worst case situation that could ever happen, because in most cases the worst-possible situation will never actually happen.

Instead, focus your energy on this moment with as much intensity as you did at that dance party that never ended. Stay up until the sun comes back up, and then puke because you made work that actually mattered.

The amazing thing about applying this kind of death-defying energy is that the more you do it, the more you have the power to do it. When you're actually using your creative energy in a powerful way, it breeds more energy.

The energy feeds itself until you're a creative super-being.

When you reach this point, you cannot fail.

THE VOID

ESCAPING YOUR OWN SUCCESS

The final element of this story is deceptively less simple than the rest.

What are you going to do with your time once you have the rest of your life to do anything?

We're so used to sitting at desks all day, being told what to do. Infinite freedom is almost a foreign concept to most of us.

Since I wrote Minimalist Business, I came face to face with this reality in a way I never could have anticipated. I've also observed a number of fellow minimalist business owners struggle with the side-effects of creating a profitable automated business.

Side effects like: infinite time, no set schedule, no destination.

I know, cry me a river right? Well, the problems are real. When you take away the regimented schedule that we've grown to know well over the last few generations, it's easy to land in The Void.

Over the last two months, I've pulled myself out of The Void using some very specific strategies. First, I want to describe to you just how I ended up in The Void. Next I want to describe to you what The Void actually looks like. Finally I want to share with you some strategies that will either help you get out of The Void, or maybe even help you avoid it entirely.

HOW TO FIND YOURSELF IN THE VOID

June 16th 2010, Oakland CA, 10:00am

I woke up in bed next to the beautiful girl I'd been dating for more than a year, who'd moved all the way to the other side of the country with me, leaving her job a month ago. The sound of traffic was just getting started outside the window on Telegraph Avenue again. The gorgeous view of the San Francisco fog receding from the Berkeley hills was easily seen from our panoramic windows.

I flipped on my iPhone and checked my bank balance. It was quite large.

The day before, I had relaunched Minimalist Business. It sold many copies at a high price point. Recently, I'd also sold a whole bunch of copies of Chris Guillebeau's Empire Builder Kit, with an even higher price point. For the first time in my life, I was in possession of a large amount of money.

I pulled on my jeans, t-shirt, and sunglasses. I tied my Converse (imagine this happening like the intro to Mr. Rogers neighborhood). I walked down the street in a kind of happy daze, this must be what Bill Gates felt like the day after he launched Windows 95, or Steve Jobs the day after he launched the iPod.

A few minutes later I got to the coffee shop I'd been a regular at. I ordered a large Ethiopian drip, and then sat down outside.

...and instantly I began to feel emptiness, The Void.

For the last year of my life I'd been working incredibly hard. Granted, for only 2 hours a day, but still. I had something to work on. I knew what I was supposed to work on. Now, it was just nothing. I sat there, looking at the Berkeley hills with my steaming hot cup of coffee in my hands, and I couldn't think of anything to work on.

I went on Twitter, I hit refresh a couple of dozen times. I sold a few more e-books. I paid for my coffee for the next twenty-three weeks in a row in an hour.

An interesting thing happens when you have incredibly strict rules regarding how much you're going to consume, and suddenly you have tons of money.

I found little ways to break the rules. Like, I purchased a $750 bicycle when a $99 beater would have worked just as well. Alix and I started to go out for dinner almost every night. I started drinking a lot more than I used to. But no amount of alcohol and fine food will fill The Void.

This is why every band that makes it big on their first album ends up with a heroin addiction by their second album (which ends up sucking). This is why Jeff Buckley fell into the Mississippi River. This is why Kurt Cobain got out the shotgun. The list of deceased artists who succumbed to The Void is endless.

I wasn't going to end up there, but fighting The Void is useless. Resistance is futile, this is The Void.

I did a lot of things to try and escape it. I started playing Starcraft II. I went on vacation in Wisconsin for 2 weeks. I turned off the comments on my blog. I went for long walks through San Francisco. I drank a lot of beer. My girlfriend and I broke up.

The truth was that none of this was fulfilling anymore —and for a few months the reason completely eluded me.

THE DIP AND THE VOID

Seth Godin talks about The Dip in his book of the same name. The Dip is what keeps people from succeeding through frustration, obstacles, and your own personal walls. It's also what keeps people from getting better than you are. I love the Dip, I can fight through any Dip I deem worth fighting through.

The problem was The Void isn't The Dip. It's something else entirely. It's the place when you don't have to struggle anymore, so you get frustrated with the lack of struggle.

The funny thing about minimalism is that it makes success so much easier to achieve, but also makes it so much easier to fall into The Void. If I had a mortgage and a car payment, I wouldn't have arrived at this place so soon.

THE PROBLEM WITH A PERFECT WORLD

Like they say, when they created the first Matrix, it was a perfect world. Everyone had everything they wanted. But then something went wrong, people started to think that the world wasn't really real. They started to look around the edges and poke around.

I stole the title of this chapter from Timothy Ferriss, the author of The 4 Hour Workweek and The 4 Hour Body. Tim came smack up against The Void as well —and well, he also gave a good amount of advice on how to battle it. Sometimes it takes some time to listen. Here's what I learned...

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN THE VOID?

The answer is simple: you have no active projects. You have a large bank account of auto-renewing cash. You still don't feel happy.

Every morning you wake up and say 'what's the point? I've made it.'

In reality, The Void is a delusion. Any person who's been through it realizes that it's a trap to keep you from getting to the next struggle. The thing is that so few people make it past The Void —they either die trying, or go get a mortgage (which is a form of dying)— that we don't have enough education to show people what their purpose is after the monetary struggle is over.

Money is simply energy manifested. If you apply enough energy in a useful area, it will come to you. If you apply enough energy, and then leverage it via the Internet, you're liable to end up with way more money than you can ever use.

Then you need to realize that money isn't everything. We forget this, because everyone we know is just trying to get enough money. If only I had $10, I could get a Whopper. If only I had $15,000, I'd buy a new car. If only I had enough money to pay off my student loans.

The reality is that there's another struggle beyond simply figuring out how to convert energy into money.

It's a secret that no one talks about, because so few people actually get to the point where they come face to face with the beast they have to answer to.

Reality is that the world is out of balance. It's not just your world, it's not just mine. It's the entire planet. We have people dying of starvation and malaria. The atmosphere is heating up. We have people who can barely get out of bed because they've been told they're supposed to eat corn for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We have people sitting at desks all day waiting to die. People pop pills that are supposed to make it feel like Christmas morning every day, but they end up being incredibly confused when the pill-popping doesn't work.

When you start to really take a look at the world's problems, you realize that The Void is just a distraction.

Summer vacation isn't where you get your energy to continue changing the world —on the contrary, I don't think I'm ever going to take a vacation again. For the last two months, I haven't even taken a weekend. I haven't needed to, because of the self-perpetuating energy that comes from pushing past The Void towards the next battle.

In a sense, I don't think I'll ever take a vacation in the lazy sense of the word again. You don't have to take vacations anymore, once you've set up a life that you don't need to escape from. Retreats are cool. Turning off your computer is a necessity. But running away to blow off steam? This is not something you need to do, but first you need to push past The Void.

IDENTIFYING THE VOID

The Void is only a temporary state. You can't exist there forever. The problem is that most people take the easy roads out of The Void —back towards where they came from. Buying a fancy sports car or a nice condo is a great way to get yourself out of The Void and back into the struggle to find enough money to pay the electric bill ASAP.

When you're in The Void, chances are you'll find yourself leaning towards one of these escape routes.

1. I'm in The Void, fill me up honey.

One of the first tendencies is to try and fill The Void up with another person. Take your boyfriend/girlfriend and try to make them pour energy into you until you feel like you're whole again. The problem is that it doesn't work. Another person only has so much energy to give you, and once you've taken it all, you're both in The Void. A relationship only works when you both elevate each other, so if one person's in The Void, chances are you're going to have to end it all at some point —and you will (and we did.)

2. I'm in The Void, drink me up.

Another good sign you're in The Void is the moment you start to go out to bars every night searching for the meaning of life. It's funny to say it now, but you know what I'm talking about if you've been there. Alcohol won't cure The Void. Neither will pot, coke, or crystal meth. You know you're in The Void if you have enough money to buy a case of bourbon and you actually buy it. You can't just cure this one by saying "I'll stop drinking." It doesn't work that way. Keep reading and I'll give you the answer to this and the others.

3. I'm in The Void, let's go to the mall!

This is one of the easiest ways to fill The Void, with stuff. Most people go this route, hop into the car and head straight to the mall. The televisions told us that stuff would make us happy, so we think it will. To a certain extent it will. People who have crotch-ripped jeans generally will feel happier when they get a new pair that isn't showing their underwear. However, most people who reach The Void already have everything they ever need to survive. Minimalism can really help with avoiding The Void. But, as we saw above, even I found ways to cheat with expensive bikes.

4. I'm in The Void, let's impress some girls.

No one who is sane is going to want to be with you when you're in The Void, no matter how much money you have. Anyone can smell a voidster when they see one. Still, one of your first instincts if you're single is to head out into the world and try to impress members of the opposite sex. This is futile until you pass through The Void, so just let it go. You'll be in a much better position once you figure out that you're in The Void and go to the other side.

5. I'm in The Void, let's run away.

Another common element is to flee. You can't handle being in The Void, so it must be where you are now that's creating it. The city is The Void, the people around you are The Void, the work you're doing is The Void. So you run. Don't get me wrong, traveling is awesome. Moving to the place you want to move is awesome. But running from The Void won't give you the escape you're looking for. This is why I choose to remain in San Francisco while I battled The Void.

6. I'm in The Void, let's succumb to hatred, rage, and jealousy.

Some people when they slip into The Void go ballistic. They can't see what's on the other side, so they start lashing out or becoming intensely defensive. They get consumed in their own emotions, and the emotions consume them. The simple truth is that these emotions are basically useless. Avoid them.

7. I'm in The Void, let's get really really busy again.

The most dangerous challenge of The Void is not realizing you're in The Void at all. People do this all the time by getting intensely busy. They check their email 124,453 times a day, they stop breathing, they run around like a chicken cut their head off. They get so busy that they can't catch their breath, and then they don't even know they're in The Void. Before you know it, their moment to see the other side is gone, and they end up back right where they started: being miserable.

There are of course dozens of other symptoms of The Void. Every person is going to be different. So it's up to you to recognize when you're headed out there. The easiest way to avoid The Void is to recognize first that you're in it, and then what you're doing to harm yourself in it. Only then can you push past into what lies beyond.

STRATEGIES FOR PUSHING PAST THE VOID

So, you've identified that you're existing in The Void. Now what? Well, we need to get you out of there so you don't hurt yourself or other people.

There are a number of strategies that I was able to put into play to get past The Void, I hope these can help you.

The first is understand that there are only four things which you'll find fulfilling after you've ended up in The Void. Before little things like renting a movie will give you your kicks, but now it's just going to seem silly to have a Netflix subscription at all. Being drunk used to be fun, but now you just end up lying in a pile of your own vomit at the end of the night feeling emptier than before. You used to get something out of sucking energy from your significant other, but now you can't anymore —it just doesn't work. You used to get a thrill driving 5 mph over the speed limit, now you just feel silly.

The Void in this way is magic, it strips away all of the superfluous elements in our lives and leaves us seeing only the truth. The truth is that we have an incredible power within us, it's just been unleashed, and we haven't learned how to deal with it.

Once you've been in The Void there are only four things you'll find fulfilling:

SAVING THE WORLD

You have the potential to be a super hero, right here, right now. Every single person who's been in The Void has an opportunity to go to the next level, which is simple: help people make their worlds better. There are a number of ways to do this.

1. Direct funding of individuals. People need money, and you have it now. Instead of wasting it on booze, get it to people who can use it. Karol Gajda is doing this by raising tens of thousands of dollars for Kiva International.

2. Take on apprentices. If you've achieved some sort of success in any field, chances are there are others who could benefit from your mentorship. The best way to go about doing this is to identify people yourself, and then approach them with advice on how to make their business better. Don't force things upon them, simply give them suggestions. I've been doing this for the last few months with a couple of businesses, and they've really started to thrive after only a few emails from me with suggestions. Pick people you think can actually succeed, don't ask for money doing this. (Coaching is for people who want you to teach them how to succeed, not people you want to teach to succeed.)

3. Ideas to shape the future of humanity. The world is changing, and we need people who will dream up what the future will look like and how we will get there. So start dreaming, and realize that fortune favors the bold. What we imagine we will create, and it's up to you to imagine it.

4. Support an organization that will save the world. There are underfunded organizations that will bring great change to the world that need your help. You can either fund these organizations directly, or you can volunteer your time. I started investing a lot of energy and money in *Yoga to the People in San Francisco*, which has both built a rewarding community and helped bring change to many people who are becoming their own best teachers through the yoga practice.

Any combination of these elements can help lift you out of The Void. I've been investing in many of them, and they all work to pull yourself past The Void.

IMPROVING YOURSELF

There's nothing better than self-improvement to get you out of The Void and into what lies beyond. What does this mean? Working full time on making yourself a better human.

There are a lot of ways that you can go about exploring the depths of your own humanity, but here are a few suggestions.

1. Research.

Reading, writing, challenging yourself to explore new subjects or delve deeper into subjects. Frequent the back corners of bookstores. Ask people who you respect what books challenged their perception of reality lately. Chances are there are an unlimited number of books which can and will blow your mind repeatedly from now until you're 95 years old. Never stop learning.

2. Physicality.

Exercise your body. There are any number of ways to do this. Start running, swimming, go to spin class. I prefer yoga, because it challenges you in the research category as well as the one below. Learn kung fu or capoeira. Start taking ballet classes. Join the baseball team. Improving your physical well being will both keep you occupied, give you energy, and make you more attractive. There is no better way to pull past into the space after The Void.

3. Build energy.

The final element is a bit more complicated. You see, all of the universe is made up of two things: matter and energy. Increasingly we're dealing more and more with just the energy part. Information is simply energy, there's no matter to it anymore. Books are cool, but the info-space is more important in the long run. Humans can also build energy to use in their own bodies, and use to elevate others. Practices like Qigong and Yoga help you harness this power in your own lives. Breathing and Pranayama exercises can help as well. When you build energy, you'll be able to maintain your calm longer and begin to see with clarity what you need to accomplish next. This energy will pull you past The Void.

The end of the story is that I made it past the void, and I hope you will too.

HOW I MADE IT

1. I started practicing yoga every day. This builds energy, keeps me busy, and provided a social circle to elevate me past the void. Yoga is a technology to build better humans beings. It shapes your mindbodyspirit in a positive way and connects you with like-minded people. At the time of this writing (Nov 2010) I'm pursuing a 200 Yoga Alliance Certification with Yoga to the People in San Francisco.

2. I began to intensively research the future of human evolution. The world is changing at a rapid rate. There are a lot of books, ideas, and developments that are moving us along. Technology is dragging human evolution faster and faster. One of the best books I've read so far this year is Kevin Kelly's *What Technology Wants*. Never stop searching for more information that is useful.

3. I did not run. My first instinct was to run from The Void. To jump on a plane and go to Peru and wander around searching for what was missing inside me. I decided to stop, to stay here for a bit until The Void had been conquered. Now that I'm on the other side, it all makes more sense and now I'm free to go wherever I need to.

...AND THE FUTURE

NEVER COME DOWN

Freedom is a direct result of exotropy.

There are various theories as to why we exist. Big bang theory, quantum particles doing their magic. The authors Brian Greene and Kevin Kelly can try to explain it to you, because I'm still wrapping my brain around the idea that origins of both evolution in humans and technology extend back to the beginnings of time.

The point is that the evolution of technology has produced a net-gain in freedom over the last 10 years that we never expected. For the first time in the history of the planet, you can live and work from anywhere.

For the first time in human history, information is more important than physical objects.

Now we have jet-setting minimalist rockstars coming out everywhere. Every day I get an email from a new person who's made the leap towards living with less and living/working from anywhere. The sheer numbers blow my mind.

Obviously not everyone succeeds, at first, but the fact remains that the freedom exists.

...and once you have a taste, you can never go back to the reality that you had before.

Every once in a while I walk through the financial district of the city that I happen to be in and watch the faces. Unhappiness rules as the drones move in swarms down the elevators, out through the doors, and into the street for their 45 minute lunch breaks.

These sad, imprisoned souls run to snatch a sandwich and get back to their desks as soon as possible. I see these faces and think of my own a mere year ago, I think about the fact that I could never go back.

Freedom is a force of nature, it's an element that ebbs and flows. You can feel it lengthening and constricting like a muscle or the way a plant grows and dies as the seasons come and go.

Once you make it to the top of the mountain once, you always remember.

We used to have backup plans, we used to be able to settle, we used to take the advice that we should never burn our bridges. This is no longer an option, not for us, not this time.

Now we're a generation that's destined to wander for all of eternity.

The remarkable truth is that once you've tasted this idea of what your life can be - once you've seen it, felt it, touched it - there is no returning to the previous state. Yogis talk of Prana, which is breath, which is energy, which is freedom. We might not be pure energy beings, but the reality is that money coming from the ether and living the minimum life are as close as we can get in this very moment.

This leaves us with the ultimate question:

If we live in a world without boundaries...

...where do we go from here?

EVERETT BOGUE

About the author.

Everett Bogue is the author of The Art of Being Minimalist, Minimalist Business, and blogger at Far Beyond The Stars. He lives in the world, with somewhere around 50 things.

Currently he's in San Francisco, but depending on when you read this, he could be living and working from anywhere.