



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

So today, we are talking about business operations, as in how your freelance business...well, I'm gonna talk a little bit about what it means. But as we're talking about business operations, particularly, we are looking at the side of your business that it's actually involved in everything, right? We've spoken so far about finance and accounting, and we're gonna look at other things online, like marketing and things like that. So operations is really something that touches all of these areas. And it's interesting because, in the research that I was doing for this call, I found some interesting...I don't know if you wanna say discrepancy about this, but operations is something that is typically its own area or division in a company, but it also, like I said, it's something that touches all sorts of divisions or functions in a company.

And so I read one thing that I thought was really appropriate for all of us, which is that they said that operations does not become its own separate entity until the business has reached a sustainable level. So what that means is for most of us, we are in startup mode. You know, with my writing business, I guess I reached a point where I was no longer in startup mode. I had stable clients and if I needed to get new clients, I knew how. And I had, you know, people that I worked with over and over again, and ways that I worked for them. And it was relatively the same, and I had my processes down and I went about my business. But anytime we pivot, right, you know, let's say you go from writing articles to writing books, or writing a blog to writing articles, whatever that is, you enter startup mode. And so the way that it works with operations is that in that startup mode, which many of us are in or many of you are in, I think most people who follow Dream of Travel Writing are making some sort of change in what they're doing with their travel writing, freelance writing, blog writing, whatever that is.

So in startup mode, operations and managing and optimizing your operations should be a part of the fabric of every single thing that you're doing, rather than thought of as something separate. But what often happens, what I see a lot, because I spend a lot of time on coaching calls talking about operations, is that the management of what you're doing is really an afterthought. We spoke earlier in this series on freelance business systems about these three different sort of hats that you wear as the business owner. And one of those is the technician. That's the person who's sitting there doing the work. One of those is the manager. That's the person to make sure all the ducks are in a row, everything gets done as it's supposed to be done. And one is the entrepreneur, the visionary, who has the big ideas and who sees the connections and who sees what's possible, right?

So operations, as we'll look at, can actually kind of touch all of those different things. But I find if we look at those three different sort of subsets of you as the business owner that we spoke about earlier in the series, I find that that management part of what is being done is often the part that gets left out. And that is what we're gonna kind of look at particularly in this, how to bring that management of what we're doing back into play. And as you'll see operations can have the different hats. It can have visionary. It can have technician as well. So particularly, what we're gonna talk about today is what does it mean to manage your business operations? I pulled a few different definitions and like we did last week with purchasing, I've highlighted some different things within each of those that I wanna bring to your attention.



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

One is particularly appropriate. It involves taxes and the government checking up on all of us as businesses. So I'll mention that in a little bit. And then I'm gonna look at...I've got some slides that are actually screenshots from a really great book. I'm gonna use a very tangible example that's not even from freelance writing or writing at all to start by looking at what does operations really mean. We're gonna talk about breakfast, which I'm in Santa Fe right now. So it's about breakfast. I'm here. I know for those of you on the East Coast, we've already passed the breakfast window. But we're gonna look at breakfast because A, it's something that's very easy to understand and to use to look at this production mechanism.

But also, it's a really great example that somebody who wrote a wonderful book on this topic, Andrew Grove, who was the CEO of Intel, which I know a lot of people these days really don't even know what Intel is, but which was a really big company in the early heyday of computers. He was this Hungarian gentleman who came to the U.S. and kind of made himself from nothing. And this book talks about how he optimized the process of managing. And he uses this great breakfast analogy that we'll look at.

And then we're gonna look at, you know, not to be tongue in cheek here, but the process of improving your processes, your business operations, and some very small, very simple tactics that you can start using today. I know a lot of you... We work in a lot of detail already in our one-on-ones on specific areas of your business, whether it's optimizing the time it takes you to do one single aspect of the pitching process or how long it takes you to write one blog post or one article for a client. And so some people are a little further down in terms of the nitty gritty of what parts of their business that they are already optimizing the operations for, but I'm gonna look at sort of more of the... In this webinar, when we talk about tactics, I'm gonna look at more of a high-level thing in a way that might jog even some of you who are already working a lot on your operations that might jog some ideas about some other things that you could work on that would be really helpful for you.

So for this series that we're doing right now on business systems, I have been mentioning in the past few webinars that one of the things that I did before doing this company while I was a travel writer was that I also ghost-wrote a website for a college business professor actually on how to start a freelance business. And that is something, along with a few other experiences I've had, that I'm really bringing into this webinar series that we're doing and obviously, all the work that we do. But I think it can be a little...it can feel weird for those who aren't already excited about this to talk about things like purchasing, and finance, and these really businessy kind of words.

Obviously, we don't talk about marketing all the time, but I realized way back working with this woman, and then as I went into having my own business as well, that having a grasp on these business systems, there's never too much of it that you can do. Every little aspect of it that you understand better, that you apply better, that you kind of integrate into your core of how you do your work, will only help you, will only take you further, will only help you make better decisions when you're faced with a difficult situation with a client, or with an interview source, or with a destination that you're visiting, anything like that.



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

And as we go into today talking about operations, I wanna mention in the next couple webinars, we're gonna talk about some things. We're gonna look at legal. We're gonna look at quality control. We're gonna look at some different things that also I know sound very not sexy, but these are some of the things that when I'm seeing people have questions, whether they're questions for me or the questions that are going on on the Facebook group, or I've been attending a couple of conferences recently and questions that people ask in conference sessions if you are really clear on a lot of these principles, those questions dissolve.

And the thing is that I see a lot of people spending really a lot of their, you know, waking work, travel, writing-related hours thinking about these questions. And so what I really wanna do with this series is to kind of, you know, grease the wheels, so to say, of you getting to where you need to be with your business by understanding all these components. So that being said, let's dive in. I just spoke a little bit about why we're offering these business webinars for writers. But the one other thing that I wanted to say on this topic is that we have a webinar that I did quite a few years ago on the secrets of six-figure travel writers. And that originated from a series that I was doing where I went around the country, and I would very specifically invite quite established travel writers, people who've been writing for say 20 years, who have been working with top publications, and things like that to this little workshop that I was doing.

And it was really interesting because there were some very clear themes that I noticed having these intimate conversations with really established travel writers. And one of them was always learning. I remember there was one person that I wrote and she said, "Well, I'm already a six-figure travel writer, but I'd love to come and hear some new things that might help me." And I thought that was so cool because you can't get to the point, particularly in this business where so many people want to be in it, want to be traveling or trying to do it... You can't get to that point of being really high earning and secure without having certain attitudes. And one of those attitudes, in addition to continuously learning, is the idea of continuous improvement, which is really related to continuously learning.

And so as we look at this operations webinar today, specifically, it really flows into that thing that you need to bank a sustainable crowd of us, which is how do we continuously not just learn what's new, but improve where we are? How do we be honest with ourselves in a non-judgmental way, every day, all the time, about what's going on in our business, and just ask yourself, "Okay, this is happening. Am I okay with this? Is this good for me? Is this good for the business? Is this good in a sustainable long term way? If not, what can I do to change it or even if it's going well, is there any way I can tighten this up?"

So as we get into looking about what business operations is, there's several different aspects of it. And it was really interesting because I couldn't find either A, a quite short definition of business operations for you. And I also couldn't find one that I felt really touched all the bases. So I have pulled a few different ones for you guys today. And I know there's a lot of text on the slide so we'll go through it. But I just wanted to say I also have one on the next page that I like quite a bit. Part of the reason that this is a little hard to define, as like I mentioned earlier, operations really touches everything that you do with your freelance



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

business, everything, whether it's, you know, invoicing, financings like we talked about, whether it's marketing, whether it's how you attend conferences and what you do there.

For instance, before the Women of Travel Summit, I had a lot of conversations with folks about what they were gonna do at this conference, how they were gonna get something out of it. And it was always really interesting to me because, as you guys know, I go to a lot of conferences and, you know, one aspect of going is that I would stop going if I wasn't getting something out of it, you know, if that would be the case for all of you in anything that you would do, especially if it involves, you know, being away from your families and things like that. And so I'm always super clear on why am I here? What do I need to do? And what does success look like for me? What if I walk away with at least this one, or two, or three things at the end of the conference? Will I feel like it was worth it for me to be here, to be jet-lagged, you know, to be away from home, and to be staying somewhere random? All these things.

And it was really interesting to me how often when I was speaking with people in advance of this recent conference, that whether it was that they hadn't thought of it isn't exactly what I'm saying. Like, a lot of times, people had kind of thought about what they wanted to get out of it. But then people didn't have a grasp that it was in their control to make sure that that happened. There were a lot of times where people were saying, like, "Oh, well, you know, I want to be inspired by people who have businesses of a certain thing." And then I would say, "Okay. Well, how do we do that," or, you know, "What kind of people inspire you," or something like that. We would get really granular about what type of person they needed to meet and then where they can most likely meet that person, how they could figure out if someone they were talking to was that person or not, how to exit a conversation that wasn't meeting their goals, and all those things.

And it was really fascinating to watch that sense of empowerment kind of growing, that you do have control over the outcomes of whether it's your time at a conference, your time as a writer, your time and your marketing, by being more strategic about what you're doing in each of those steps. And so for those of you who are listening to this webinar... I know the folks who are on this webinar are pretty good about this, but those of you who are listening to this webinar on the replay who have not really dived in yet to this operations area, I want you to know it is powerful. There is a lot that you can do in terms of making and ensuring the things that you want to happen actually come to pass. So as we dig into this now, I've got four different definitions for you here on the screen. And there's another one, like I said, that I like quite a bit on the next slide. So this first one here, operations management is the administration of business practices to create the highest level of efficiency possible within an organization.

Now, anybody who's heard me speak probably, you know, like, at least twice, knows that I'm kind of a stickler about efficiency. And if you've traveled with me, for instance, you may have seen that the whole time I'm on a tour, I'm constantly taking notes. I'm writing down every single thing that I can capture that the person says. And some people feel like that's silly. They're like, "Well, you're not gonna use all that." And I had a coaching call recently where we talked about this idea of, you know, not wanting to have heard something on a tour and interview, and then want to use it later, find a home for it, and not know what the thing



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

was anymore. And so on the one hand when I'm on tour, which I'm gonna be doing tomorrow, and I'm taking all these notes, I'm also thinking of my future self and not wanting to disadvantage my future self of not having some fact that I might need to put in my article or some idea that I thought might be a good article idea, not having enough information about it to move forward.

But I'm also being efficient with my time there on the tour because let's say I'm not taking good notes, and I'm just kind of listening to what the person saying. It's very easy in that setting, and I see this a lot, for people to start checking other emails on their phone or to generally being distracted about something else. And to me, it's like an efficiency stickler. I know that this tour that I'm on with this person who is say, the director of this museum, or whatever the case may be, this is an opportunity that I have for this person's time. And I don't know if I'm gonna have it again, I don't know if I will. I don't know if it makes sense for their time or my time to have it again.

So I also wanna be efficient in terms of getting the maximum information that I can that I might need for the future out of that moment. And so that means that not only am I taking notes, but I'm taking notes so that if I have an idea during the tour, and I'm like, "Hey, will this work? Like could this really be an article," I can also look through my notes there right away, see what I have, and then I'll pull all those things together in an email and I'll send myself an email saying, "Potential article idea."

And in the subject line of the email, I put the article idea. If I have any ideas about what magazines that might fit in or specific sections, I'll put that on the subject line. And then I copy everything from my notes that's relevant to that specific article idea and I put it right there in that one email, which means that later, when I wanna go and use the article idea, I don't have to go back through my notes and try to figure out where in my notes these things were said or even try to understand the context of the whole tour again to try to figure out why I thought this was important. I've put all of that in an email to myself right there at the moment while I'm on the tour. And I make sure that everything that I can think of that I might need for that future moment is right there in the email. So that kind of highest level of efficiency possible, that is something that makes so many other things possible for you in the future, right?

If I wasn't taking detailed notes on that tour, like I said, there might be some fact that I really wanna put in that article and now I can't find it anymore. The person said it. I don't know whether they got it from I can't find it online I can't find the right search term. Done. And I'll waste like an hour or half an hour looking for that thing. But likewise, how many of us come home from trips, and we either don't pitch those articles ever or we don't pitch those articles right away, okay? This thing where I send myself these pitch idea emails gives me like a cherry-picked way to start. It gives me an easy win. It gives me easy access into pitching that trip. And like I said, it makes a process of writing the pitch and figuring out where that pitch should go also much, much faster. So it allows me to, for instance, pitch articles based on a trip or one single tour that I would probably never pitch if I had to sit around and go back through those notes and try to remember what was happening and then think again about where that might fit, okay?



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

So definition number two here. Operations management is an area of management concerned with designing and controlling the process of production and redesigning business operations in the production of goods and services. Now, I'm gonna pause. There's a second sentence on this one too. But I really like this idea of designing the process of production and then like I said, redesigning operations to make that work. Now, this is the kind of thing where often people will tell me how they do something. And then I might say, "Why?" And then they tell me either something like that's how they've always done it or that's how somebody told them that they had to do it or something like that.

But something that's always really important to me in terms of how I ran my freelance business, how I run this business now, how you guys run your freelance businesses, is that we never do things just because that we do things because they are, you know, a choice that we have actively made. And so this idea that your business process doesn't have to be just what it is. The way that you write a blog post for a client or actually, let's take a better step, the way that you and your client agree on blog posts ideas, which I know for a lot of people results in, you know, waiting around until the client finally has time to send you the ideas and then they want the blog post two days ago, even though they just sent you the ideas and so on and so forth.

We don't have to live with things the way they are. We can design those processes. And sometimes that involves redesigning other things that already exist to make that work, okay? But this is all, like I said, in service of efficiency and inefficiency not for, you know, the end goal of efficiency of itself but efficiency for us doing more work, for doing better work, for doing our best work. And also for having our best lives outside of that, you know, having time to be seen and not having to respond to emails at weird hours and to take the trips that you wanna take and to spend time with your family and friends. So the second half of this definition is it involves the responsibility of ensuring the business operations are efficient in terms of using as few resources as needed.

And this is what it involves the responsibility of or it involves the effective... Sorry. This sentence was really weird to me. But I like it though. So I'm just gonna kind of ignore this sort of grammar error in the sentence here. Effective in terms of meeting customer requirements. Now, we looked at this a little bit in some of the past webinars, and we'll dig more into this as well. But this is really important for operations, that we are effective in terms of meeting customer requirements.

I just did a talk at the Women and Travel Summit on this idea of what does success look like for your editor, for your client, for the DMO who's organizing the trip that you're on? What is it that they need to get out of this? Figure out what that one thing is, and focus on it, and forget all this other stuff. So, you know, I have had or seen, you know, people who have some article assignment and the editor just needs it like immediately. They've come to you because they have some desperate need. And then the writer gets sidetracked on this whole thing. They can't get one source. They can't get one fact. You know, they're waiting on XYZ to happen. Their process is just that they write slowly or something like that.



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

And the thing is that no matter how perfect your article is right now, that's not what the editor needed. The editor needed the article as fast as possible, okay? So effective in meeting customer requirements can take a lot of different dimensions, right? Sometimes what's effective is that you follow the style guide absolutely to the letter and that nobody else needs to spend their time reviewing the article that you wrote because you did exactly what was expected of you that was outlined. Sometimes the customer requirements is that the customer, your editor, or your client, if it's a company, doesn't know what they want. And what they actually require is for you to help them figure that out because if you just wrote what they told you to write it wouldn't achieve their actual objective, which was to increase visitors to their website or increase people booking their tours or something like that.

Now, being effective in terms of meeting customer requirements really ties back to this thing though of being efficient in terms of using as few resources as needed. So when I was giving this example of the person who was, you know, being a perfectionist about this article when the editor really just needed it to fill a hole that someone else had dropped out on an article, they weren't being efficient with their resource of time. They probably also weren't being efficient with like the information that they gathered and things like that. But being efficient by using as few resources as needed is really one of these patterns that I see in hiring freelance writers.

They don't over research things. They don't spend time on something just to be a perfectionist about it or just to, you know, finesse some words or something like that. Being efficient with resources for us as writers largely comes down to our time. Sometimes it can come down to, you know, the research that we have in terms of having too much of it but it largely comes down to our time. And so, you know, I sometimes see people who are working on let's say, a roundup that they've gotten assigned and, you know, I'm familiar with the publication. I looked at the article, and it's the level of depth for this article is something that can be achieved in a phone interview, if not an internet search, but for sure a phone interview, like a 5, 10-minute phone interview.

And yet the person is driving all around, you know, the region or a town to do the roundups, and they end up going to the place, and they have to try this food, and then they're taking photos and they end up at each stop for 45 minutes. And then it takes them like 15 or more minutes to get in between each stop. And then, you know, it's time but it's also research has ballooned into like eight times the number of hours that you're reasonably being paid to work on this piece. And one could say, "Well, I'm being efficient because I have to research this thing anyway. And I wanna get the most article ideas out of it." Great. Then I expect that the day after you file the story you are out there pitching 15 other articles based on this research because, otherwise, you were not being efficient with your resources, okay?

Now, it was really funny when I saw this particular definition. I'm being audited by the State of New York right now. And as we've been kind of looking at, you know, what we need to provide for the audit and all this stuff, which is like another massive project on my plate that's gonna kill 1,000 trees because I had to print out so many different things for the government, it's been really interesting to kind of, you know, reevaluate everything that we



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

do in this lens because that's what they're gonna look at, right? They're gonna look at was there a real business purpose for this?

That's what they wanna see because according to the government, all of us who are freelance writers have freelance businesses, if we are not doing something with a profit-earning purpose, then they don't count that as towards our business. And, I mean, we really think particularly in the lens of this webinar about how much time so many people that I talked to are spending on things that the government would not approve as a profit-earning purpose. Like just how many hours go into things that don't relate back to a specific thing, which is selling something to somebody.

And so I just wanted to put that kind of bug out there of like, obviously, when we file our taxes, we put our expenses in there and I know a lot of people tend to be very frugal on what expenses that they list in their tax return because, you know, they don't wanna raise any eyebrows. But imagine if the government, because they can and they would if they audited you, also audit your time because that's how it works, that you need to tell them how much time you spent on this and all these things. Ask yourself if they also audited your time, would they approve? Would it pass? Would they still consider that you were spending 100% of your time on this business? So that's just food for thought there.

The next definition here, the business function... Again, so this is defining operations management. The business function responsible for managing the process of creation of goods and services, it involves planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling all the resources needed to produce a company's goods and services.

So, again, you guys are all producing probably both goods and services. You're producing goods in the form of articles that come out. But you might also be producing services that you might not realize where you're helping a client figure out what their content needs to be about or what the article is gonna be about, or something like that. But I like what this one says about the process of creation because I think often this idea of production that I've spoken about before, it feels a little far away. It feels a little like a factory. But I think the idea that we can manage the process of creation, and creation isn't just this weird fairy thing that flits around and does what it wants, is very important to think about. And then like I mentioned, the last one that involves controlling the resources because when you don't control the resources, then the process of creation just becomes, you know, the blob of creation. We're gonna look at what's inside that blob and how that works in another slide.

So last one here, operations management focuses on carefully managing the processes to produce and distribute products and goods. And I wanted to have this in here because I think that another thing that we often don't think about quite so much is this idea of how we are physically going about distributing our work in terms of how we deliver to the client and the best way to optimize that. This is something I used to be really on top of is like what, you know, particularly for clients that I was doing articles, but I had to also collect the files of the photos and deliver the photos to them. What makes the most sense for the editor? I don't wanna sit there and rename all these files with what I think the title of the file should be.



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

That's like 45 minutes of my time that I'm not getting back. And it doesn't make any difference to the editor because they have a totally different way that they do it, okay?

So this one I was reading yesterday when I was on the plane. I couldn't figure out exactly where it came from. I had just written it down in my notebook but operations managers ensure flawless execution across all engagements. Now, notice this isn't flawless delivery, or flawless deliverable, or flawless product. It's flawless execution. And that's something that I really love the idea of aspiring to. How can we not only produce something, write something, whatever word you want to use there, a verb, that is what the client wants, but how can we ensure that the act of creating it goes as flawlessly as possible? We're gonna talk about this flawless idea more in a little bit but first, let's talk about the big blob of the artistic creation production mass, okay?

So I told you we're gonna use Andy Grove's breakfast example. And this is from the book, "High Output Management," is where these slides come from. It's really interesting and for those of you who like to read businessy books, I know not everybody does. But for those of you who enjoy nonfiction and that variety, I highly recommend checking it out. "High Output Management." So this here is the production black box. So we can imagine that at the side there was his breakfast. We can imagine it says, "Writing your article," instead. So in that situation, if the output is writing articles, what would be the raw materials here? The raw materials would be things you already know. They'd be internet research, and they'd be interviews, okay? And that goes in the box. And in the middle is labor, all the things that go on in your head and on your laptop that make the article come out at the end, right?

Now, let's break down breakfast. So the example that Andy Grove uses is that when he was younger... Well, he's passed away now. Actually, in my hometown is where he lived when he passed away. But he worked as a waiter somewhere as a side job and it was in a hotel. And at the hotel, obviously, they have a lot of guests coming down and they want breakfast. And at the hotel, the sort of standard breakfast plate that they put together or the breakfast tray, had a three-minute egg, so a soft-boiled egg, some toast, and some coffee. So he made this kind of visual here to talk about what he initially thought would be the best process, you know, the best operation, for creating the deliverable, which is this breakfast tray. So like I said, the breakfast tray has the eggs. They're three-minute eggs. It's got the toast and it's got coffee. So we imagine, obviously, that the coffee is somehow being made somewhere by somebody, and probably in large batches, and they're just gonna get the coffee out of whatever the carafe or the big sort of coffee pouring thing is, right?

Now, the toast, obviously, it's supposed to be hot. So that needs to be toasted more or less right before it goes to the person. But it seems like the lynchpin here, and that's why it's at the top, is this three-minute egg, okay, because the egg, obviously, you need to kind of do it and take it out. It can't really get cold afterwards. It's like the toast can get a little bit cold but the egg really needs to go right then, okay? So he set it up where because the egg takes the longest and needs to be the last thing that finishes, everything here is built around the egg, okay?



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

So you can just imagine and you can even just imagine this kind of like in your own kitchen, right? Pretend the coffee's already made. It's in the coffee pot. The water's already boiling. And like, let's say it's Christmas, and you're hosting a bunch of people. And you're putting together trays for breakfast as people come up, right? So you can kind of picture, "Here's a new person. Let me grab an egg to put in." Great, I put the egg. Let me grab the bread and put it in the toaster. Let me pour the coffee. Great. The egg's done. Let me put everything together on the tray.

Now, there's two things that you might notice here and I can't point because it's right here on the thing, but on the bottom where it says, "Pour coffee and toast," this is test. Now, we're gonna talk more about this idea of testing and how that relates to operations in a little bit. But the reason that that testing is there is this. So imagine you're pouring coffee. Now, as you're pouring it, you're watching the cup. As the coffee gets closer to the top of the cup, you keep checking. Is it close? Is it almost full? Is it almost full? And then someone says, "Okay, it's full," and you stop. Now, the same thing with the toast. So like the toast comes out of the toaster and sometimes, you know, the toaster was just used before you used it. So the toaster was really hot and so the toast might get done faster or slower or something like that. So that test step on the toast is to look and see is the toast done? Is the toast ready?

Now, the reason the egg doesn't have one is because we don't crack the egg open and look at it to see if it's done yet, right? We just put it into a little egg cup, and we send it on its way. Now, this process that we've got here for breakfast, like I said, is it's relatively simple. I mean, making a soft-boiled egg like for breakfast is not necessarily the simplest thing or fresh toast and whatnot. But there's some things that aren't captured here, right? So somehow the coffee needs to get made somewhere else. The water needed to have already been boiling. So there's some things that aren't captured here, but this is a pretty simple example. So I've got a couple examples for you that are less simple because they kind of capture the whole thing, but I just wanna look at them quickly to see kind of what some of these things look like for travel writers.

So the first one here is a trade magazine article. So you'll see here I've got like 14 steps, and it goes through. The editor contacts you to ask if you'd be interested in doing an article. They may want you to flush out a pitch on the topic. They may provide sources. If not, you need to find them. Then you need to contact them and vet them. And you need to schedule the interviews and maybe follow up with them to make sure that they scheduled the interviews or that they show up for the interviews. And then you do the interviews, and you have notes. Maybe you transcribe the call, if you have to, for the magazine that you're working with. And then you do some more research based on the interviews.

And then you go through your interview and your research notes, and you create an outline for the article. But then now that you have the outline, you realize there's some other things you need to research. You have to go back and research those, and then you write it and you check it for flow. You check it for grammar. If you need to find the photos, you're going to collect those, and then you're going to send it off to the editor. The editor might have rewrites that might need additional research and interviews. And then you're gonna send that back and then you're going to invoice and you're going to follow up until the invoice is paid.



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

So obviously, this has a lot more going on than that breakfast example. But I wanted to look at this in terms of what would be a process, like this breakfast example, that we as a travel writer would have. So another one here is breaking an article down from a big trip. Now, I don't wanna go through this whole one. So you can look at this in a lot more detail. But basically, you know, with an article that we wanna pitch from a big trip, we're gonna think about what we did, what magazines I can go in. We're gonna check if this actually fits for the magazine. We're gonna check if the destination has been covered. We're gonna outline the pitches. We're gonna do some research for the pitches. We're gonna make sure the pitch still fits the magazine. We're gonna edit the pitches. We're going to find the email address, and so on and so forth.

Now, there's one more that I want to switch over and show you here that I don't have in the slides because it's got even more text. This is actually a completed process for how to do a copywriting project that's quite detailed. And this is actually probably more similar to the Andy Grove example, which had the time and different things. So this one is arranged. So if you have a copywriting project, okay? And it seemed like a relatively sort of simplistic copywriting project, okay? You arrange a call with the client, where you're gonna brainstorm. You get then to talk about the product in a free form way. You get them to identify the pain points that their product overcomes. You try to force them to identify 20 pain points, then you get your client to list of features of their product. And then you get them to list the benefits of their product. You have an audio file of the call and you get it transcribed. Then you request other items from your client.

All of their marketing, basically their website brochure. You ask them about their competitor's website. Then you make a list of each of the pains, features, and benefits. You send it back to the client and ask them if there's anything else that you missed. Then you ask the client to collect testimonials for you. You actually set out for the client questions to help them collect the testimonials so that you get back good usable testimonials, then you make sure to follow up with the client if you haven't received the testimonials. Now, you have the testimonials. You have a full list of the pain points, the features, and the benefits.

And you sit down and you write up the copy, whether it's a sales page or, you know, if it's more like website copy, something like that. And we can even go through here and break down kinda what would be the format that you'd use to put those things together. But this is kind of like the prep of what leads into creating the copy, okay? And like I said this one, I'm gonna go back to the slides now, is quite detailed more like that Andy Grove example of the eggs and I'll go back and show you that just for another second.

All right. So that copywriting one really had kind of all these steps and all these different dependencies whereas the ones that I put together for you are a little more kind of free form like what it goes through on a timeline. But what I hope that you saw in both of those actual more real-life examples that I gave you was that it's never as simple as... I'll just show you again so you can see the difference. It's never as simple as eggs, toast, coffee. I mentioned to you before the potential wrinkles of, you know, who's making the coffee? Who's boiling the eggs? How do we make sure those things get ready?



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

But what I didn't mention that Andy Grove brings up, as well, is there's a bunch of waiters putting these breakfasts together at the same time because it's a hotel, and there's hundreds of guests, and the toaster is not always free. So you might actually need to wait for the toaster. So that might be the first thing that you need to do is get your bread and wait in line for the toaster. And then the last thing that you end up doing is doing the toast because that actually is the linchpin in yourself.

Now, we can all think about those of you who write articles for magazines. This is like the case with the interviews, right? And I put it first when I went through that process, but the interviews often feel like that linchpin, you know. We have to figure out who the interviews are, more or less, first and foremost, and start emailing them and make sure that those people who will actually participate, and then follow up with them to make sure that we actually have a phone call. And I didn't even mention what if they wanna review their quotes before you put the article together? That's like a whole other wrinkle, right? So often, the operations of something, whether it's as "simple" as delivering a tray of breakfast or collecting information from a client for a copywriting project, actually have a number of different steps and dependencies and things that need to be prepared in order to do the thing that you need to do that we, as freelance travel writers, don't think about as a process that we can manage, okay?

Now, as you look at this example here with the toast, obviously, we can imagine that, you know, let's say somebody was trying to follow this process. Let's say Andy Grove was trying to follow this process as this waiter in the hotel. And he thought about what it would look like. And then when he went to do it, he realized there was a problem, okay, and he had to do it differently. Now, this is probably something that's come up for all of us, okay? You've got your first article assignment writing for a magazine, you set up to do the interviews, and then you're like, "Oh, my God, I should have done this earlier because it's taking me forever to get these people on the phone." But what about the things that happen kind of every time that we know about, but we just need to make sure that they're still moving along, okay?

So I mentioned here write these test steps again. You've got this at the end of the toast, right, and at the end of the coffee. Now, what do these test steps look like for us in our writing? I mentioned a couple times now this idea of interviews and getting the interview secured. So it might be that you know if you haven't already secured and scheduled the interviews by three weeks out from your article you might want to set up back-up interviews. You might want to get a little more aggressive on the email follow-ups.

It might be that you know that if the editor has not given you any requests for rewrites or accepted the article but her publication is gonna come out or need to go to the printer in a week, you might know that she might come to you with a very quick last-minute expectation that you're going to turn around rewrites. So you might introduce a step for yourself where you say, "Hey, I haven't heard if this article is accepted or not. Can you let me know if you might be needing rewrites, so that I can plan my schedule accordingly.?"

I just did this, for instance, with somebody who is working on a book project, a guidebook, where she pushed her deadline for the book out a little bit. I think maybe they reordered



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

when the guidebook was gonna come out in the book publisher thing, but then it was like eight months ago or maybe not eight months, but you know, like three, four months had gone by, and she hadn't gotten any edits back from her editor. And she's now looking at three months from when the absolute final copy of the book needs to be done. And she knows that basically, she might be getting an entire chapter with rewrite request back every week if the editor started sending her rewrites immediately right now

So we put together this email to send her editor that said, "Here's what my schedule looks like for the next three months. You know, given where we are right now, with the editing, I've only got one chapter back. It looks like I'll probably be getting a chapter back from you every week. But I can't necessarily work on a chapter every week. I have these other trips. I have to do this and that and the other thing. So could you please give me your deadlines for yourself when you're going to give me these chapters back so we can make sure that I can get them done for you, okay?"

So these little windows here are basically all times when we can peek at different parts here, okay and say to myself, say to yourself, say to ourselves, "If I have an X by Y, then the output is not gonna happen." So let's say, for instance, let's take this, an article from a big trip example because we've used this writing up an article for an editor example a lot. So let's say that you've gone on this big trip, you wanna push the articles, and you went on this trip in advance of the tourist season for this destination. So let's say that it's like Greek Islands, okay, right? They're pretty strict there. They're like things close. People can't really do a ton in a lot of the Greek Islands from like the beginning of October on, okay, especially if they're smaller islands. So let's say that you went there in February, or March, or something like this, okay? And a lot of things were closed, but you asked a lot of questions. You took some pictures. Maybe you even went the October the year before, something like that.

So you've gone in advance and you know that for people to even travel to the destination, they're gonna need to make some plans. So let's say we're optimizing this for the people to travel to this destination, say in July, okay? People need to make some plans. So let's say maybe June, May. So maybe by May, they need to be seeing this article.

So that means that if the article needs to come out in May, and you have traveled there like in February, and you want to pitch large magazines, magazines that have a longer timeline, and you're three months out from when this probably be coming out, right now the only thing that you can be pitching them is front of book pieces because their features for these articles, for these issues, will already be done, right? So that means that you need to make sure that as you are putting these pitches together, that you have the pitches for any magazines of that size that are gonna be working that far out done as soon as possible and that you follow up with them aggressively because otherwise, you're gonna miss that window.

Now, what about smaller magazines where maybe they're working more like two weeks to a month before the issue is going out is when they're kind of putting everything together. It's okay for you to get in with them for, you know, a 1,000-word article or maybe a feature two or three months in advance. But you still need to be a little more aggressive about that because if you really wanna write a feature somewhere, and now you're getting closer to two



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

months, or one month before the magazine's coming out, the likelihood of that is diminishing.

So you can look at your end result here, which is articles coming out in magazines and the appropriate time to cover that seasonal destination. And you can back all the way up and say, "Okay, have I hit this? Do I have the pitches for the big magazines done first and as soon as possible and for the front of books sections, which are more likely to be approved? No. Okay, well, how can I reorganize what's going on in my production black box to make sure that this happens? And then how can I make sure that I have the feature pitches done directly after that, okay?" And then you go on, and then, obviously, you're gonna incorporate follow-ups, and things like that, as well.

So a lot of the things that we've been talking about involve how much time different things take. Now, things like interviews, right, like that's not necessarily something about how much time it takes you. You can track how long it takes to do interviews. And this is actually something that I do chat with people about is not necessarily spending as much time on their interviews or how to optimize the time they spend on their interviews. But for people to get back to you to set up the interviews, that's like a little squishier but you still need to know approximately how long that's taking you because if you don't know you can't do anything about it. You can't make contingency plans. You can't do it earlier. So while I talk a lot about using an hourly rate calculator or using just a time tracker of some kind to keep an eye on your hours, you really need to know about a lot more things than just you.

You need to know what's the average of how long it's taking editors to get back to you right now. And you need to have that segmented out by different types of publications, whether it's large publications versus editors that you've already worked with versus smaller publications that you haven't worked with and that you have worked with, okay? You need to have all these metrics going on in order to be able to create that black box and to introduce the right test steps, okay? So knowing your numbers can be how many pitches that you send and how many of those get assigned because if you don't know that, and you make some change in how you're sending your pitches, right... Let's say you decide that you don't want to spend all this time trying to get to know the exact style of the magazine, and you just wanna write the pitch that feels good for you to write and then see how many people accept that and if that works better or not, you won't be able to tell if it's better or not if you don't have your acceptance percentages from before you made that change, okay?

So succeeding as a freelancer, but particularly succeeding in the operations of your freelance business, it all comes back to tracking your numbers, guys, okay? Now, before we go on to talking about where do we start looking inside that box because I've given you some different things to think about here, right, in terms of what numbers that you need to track, what things are actual processes, and maybe you weren't thinking of the process but in terms of where to start, there's a lot of different things that we've talked about, right? And there's so many parts of your business can be optimized. I really like this quote, "It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out. It's the pebble in your shoe." Okay? So what that means is that it's not... You can think about this big picture things that you can change. You can think about re-envisioning your processes for your business in the beginning. And that can seem actually



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

really exciting because it's kind of big picture. It's that, you know, visionary entrepreneur hunt.

But the things that are gonna help you the most in terms of optimizing your business operations right now are the things that are currently annoying you. So what is that? Is it that editors aren't getting back to you? Is it that you think it's gonna take you a day to write an article and it always takes three? Is it that sources aren't getting back to you? Is it that it feels like it takes you forever to do the research-driven articles? What is that thing that's annoying you right now? Because that's the thing not only that is gonna be simplest for us to address, but it's also gonna make the biggest impact for you, okay, in terms of optimizing your operations, okay? So take that big rock, that big frog, whatever you wanna call it. Think about what is currently annoying you the most about your business and ask yourself. Start by thinking about ideas. What jumps out to you? What are some different ways that I could make this better? And then gather the data to see what the situation is now and just start testing. Start testing some different other options and see what's best, okay?

So once you figure out what those pebbles are for you, okay, what is the thing that's really just getting on your nerves, it's just making you unexcited and unenthusiastic about your freelance business, then we can move through this. So first, we start with insights. Some insights are, what needs to change? What's not working? Why do you think it might not be working? What could we potentially do different, okay? And then the process, processes putting in some other intentional ways that you are gonna address the situation. And then improvements, seeing which one of those... You gotta look at the numbers, right? And then you have to say, "Did this change? Did this make an improvement or not?" If not, then you go back. Okay, what insights have I learned from this trial? What process can I put in place to test? What are the improvements? Did we get improvements?

Now, some of you, particularly some of you who are on the call live, but probably some of you out there listening on the replay as well, are already doing some sort of tracking of something, even if it's just kind of in your head. It might be that you're not tracking your time, and you're not exactly tracking how many pitches that you send out, but you might kind of be tracking how much income you're bringing in every month, and how many articles that is, or something like that. So think about what data you have available, whatever that is for you, okay? So, you know, be kind to yourself. If you don't have a lot of data, but let's say you have a blog, like you can look at how many blog posts you've put out over, you know, the past month or something like that, okay? What data do you already have and what insights can you draw from it about high-risk collaborating?

Now, then the next question is if you look at the data that you have, and you say, "Oh, well, it seems like this," then the next step is, well, what data do we need to have to know what's really going on, okay? Because we can't have real insights or make real improvements if we don't know what's really happening here, okay? So now, that you've got some ideas, what data do you need to collect to be fully aware of what's going on? And then what can you start to create a process for because I promise you if you don't have repeatable processes for anything that you're doing, even if you feel like you kind of do the same thing every time, but



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

you don't have a checklist for yourself maybe of how you sign off on a blog post, you know, to make sure that everything's done before you put it online...

It might be an easy example or the same thing with an article. You know, like, I know some people have these really cool lists of words that they frequently overuse and, sort of, you know, Genki sentence structures that they typically repeat and things like that. What can you put a process in place for yourself? Because once you have that process, that's where you can start improving it because now you're doing it the same way every time. You're always doing start the egg, start the toast, start the coffee, or start the toast, start the egg, start the coffee, whatever that is for you.

Once you start doing that repeatedly every time then you can see what the numbers really are, what they are every time, what's secure, what you know. And then you can start introducing some changes there and see what actually results in an improvement. So it's an easy opportunity to create processes. I kind of go from small to large here. Number one, invoicing clients. I always just had a template and if I had clients with different needs, I'd have a client for each template and then a template for each client. And then every time it was time to invoice I would just go in, I'd fill in the blanks, and out the invoice would go. Another one, contracts, right? If you don't already have contracts with your clients, please get them. But contracts are something that also you can have a relatively fill-in-the-blank thing. You can even have a sheet for yourself. You know, if the client has a clause of this, then I want to ask them to change to this clause and here's the language that I'll send them.

Emails for interview sources. This is one that I did really, really early on, because otherwise, you can just kind of sit there forever, is I just had a big file of all sorts of different emails for interview sources that were... I kind of had a basic one. And then like maybe some different lines that would change if it was really urgent or if they were a big person that was kind of trying to pander them or if I needed images from them or not, or whatever it was. Collecting and storing research information. I just had a really interesting coaching call with somebody about this the other day, about how she had started kind of creating a notes file for herself where she would cut and paste everything from her internet research. And she had like a system of how she was doing it and all these things because she didn't want to be working on an article and have some like data points and statistic, some quote or something that she wanted to include, and then she didn't know where it came from.

Collecting and storing insights from interviews. This is a cool one that I don't think as many people think about that when you get off the interview call, you can write like a debrief from yourself, for yourself, very quickly of like, "What were the three most important things this person said? Like, what did they say that I for sure wanna include in the article? And, you know, what did I learn from this interview that I didn't know about this topic before?" And then collecting and storing ideas for trips. I already gave an example of this before and I know I talk about that one kind of frequently. But these are some processes, you know, starting from the really easy stuff you're already doing that you can put in place to do the same way every time, whether you have... You know, I gave the example of a fill-in-the-blank, like you have a format that you use, or it could be that you just have a checklist that



Dream of Travel Writing

Freelance Business Systems: Operate Like a Boss

you use, or it could be that you just kind of say "Okay, when I do this, I do A, and then B, and then C." So it can be more like an actual process or procedure.

So you can't improve something you don't know about, guys. I talked a lot about collecting that information you need to make better decisions. But think about that black box that we saw, okay? Think about your current work process, whether that's your process for your marketing, which we'll get into later for your invoicing, like we've already talked about, whether it's for writing your articles, whatever your black box is, whatever part of your business that you just don't really know how it works.

And maybe it causes some consternation to you because you don't know how long it's gonna take you to do XYZ thing. Where can you start cutting holes in that box today? Where can you start introducing some test steps? Where can you start saying, "Okay, I know I need to have X in order to do Y. Let me start checking every time I reach point X and seeing what's going on so that I can ensure that I'm actually reaching Y, that I'm actually getting what I need out of this conference, that I'm actually placing the articles from this trip, that I'm actually getting these articles done in the amount of time that I need to get them done in for my hourly rate to work out."

So that's what I got for you guys about operations. Thank you, guys, so much for joining me today and I'll talk with you all again soon.