¡ A comprehensive guide based on analysis of YouTube videos, for non-commercial use

Personal brand

Building trust and authority:
foundations, worldview, content.

16 chapters | 24 exercises | Workbook at the end

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is based on analysis of publicly available YouTube videos about the Brand Journey Framework, Caleb Simpson's own system. Caleb is an expert with 17 years of experience building personal brands. Over that time, he has helped create some of the largest personal brands in entrepreneurship, identifying principles that work regardless of niche, platform or audience size.

grabbing headlines. This book takes a different approach. It looks beyond the numbers, at foundations, worldview and trust.

Inside, you will find:

- A clear system for building a personal brand from scratch
- Tools for finding your unique position
- A content strategy that converts, rather than simply collecting views
- Exercises after every chapter to put ideas into practice immediately
- Checklists and templates for independent work

> “Most people think they need to improve their content. But after 17 years of working with personal brands, I can say that getting the foundations right matters most, before you even touch your content strategy.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

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INTRODUCTION

Why most personal branding strategies don’t work

Open any personal branding course and the first things you'll hear about are posting, hooks, headlines and algorithms. Every day, thousands of people pick up a camera, press Record and start talking. Most quietly give up after three to six months.

Not because they're bad at it. Not because they lack talent. But because they started at the wrong end.

They built a facade without foundations.

Content is just a tool. And a tool only works when you have answers to deeper questions: who you are, what you stand for, how you're different and why people should listen to you.

This book is about foundations. About the work you need to do before filming videos, writing posts and building funnels.

Work through it methodically. Do the exercises. By the end, you'll have more than an understanding. You'll have a plan.

A brand isn’t made of what you say. It’s made of what people associate you with.

Foundations

What a brand is, the framework's four questions and why authority cannot simply be claimed.

CHAPTER 1

What a brand really is

Before building a brand, you need to understand what it is. Most people confuse one element of branding with branding itself.

The real definition

A brand is always an outcome. You can't create it directly; you arrive at it through a process.

Branding is the intentional pairing of relevant things, done consistently. A brand becomes the by-product of that process: the moment an audience starts automatically associating you with something specific.

> “Branding is the intentional pairing of relevant things, done consistently. When you do this again and again, a brand emerges: the audience intuitively starts associating you with that thing.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Consider Nike and Michael Jordan, one of the best-known examples of branding in history:

- Nike was entering the basketball market.
- Michael Jordan was a basketball legend.
- Nike paired itself with Jordan, intentionally and relevantly.
- Jordan wore the shoes not for one or two games, but for every game throughout his career.
- The result: audiences began associating Nike with winning, greatness and basketball.

The key word here is consistently. Without it, the pairing doesn't work.

The biggest mistake is believing that colors, a logo and an aesthetic are the brand. They are only elements of branding.

Three essential components

Intention

You consciously choose what to associate yourself with.

Relevance

What you associate yourself with matters to your audience.

Consistency

You do it again and again, without exception.

The paradox of a personal brand is that it isn't built for you. It's built for the audience you want to serve. Understanding this from the start matters because it changes the direction of your entire strategy.

The potential of your personal brand depends directly on the significance of your career or life achievements. People will listen only when you have real experience to back up your words.

Exercise 1.1 · The association formula

Exercise 1.2 · Branding audit

CHAPTER 2

The Brand Journey Framework: four questions that change everything

BRAND JOURNEY FRAMEWORK © CALEB SIMPSON

Before you start creating content, answer four questions. They will give you a clarity that most creators don't have even after years of work.

Why you should “start with the end”

Most people begin making content because they think they should, or because everyone else is doing it. That's a trap. Without a clear end goal, you'll spend enormous resources, including time, money, vulnerability and openness, without getting the result you want.

Some people shouldn't be creating content at all. At least not yet. That's not a verdict, just an honest assessment. Before investing in content, you need to answer one question: why?

1 What is the goal?

What should happen on the other side of this personal brand? What do you want it to help you achieve?

Example goals:

- Speak at conferences as an expert
- Attract clients to your agency or business
- Launch and sell an online course
- Become an adviser to major companies
- Become a voice for change in your industry

Be specific. The clearer your goal, the clearer your path.

2 What do I need to be known for to achieve that goal?

This is a positioning question. What perception in your audience's mind will lead to your desired outcome?

For example, if you want to speak on stage and inspire young women to build businesses, you need to be known as a woman who built a successful business and helped other women do the same.

3 What do I need to DO to become known for that?

We become known not for what we talk about, but for what we do and the results we achieve.

This is about actions, not words. If you want to be known as an entrepreneur who scales businesses, you need to scale a business. If you want to be known for building personal brands across niches, you need to work across niches.

4 What do I need to LEARN to do the things that lead to recognition and results?

This is your roadmap for knowledge and skills. Every business has many departments: marketing, sales, HR and operations. Each involves countless skills. This question helps you prioritize what to learn.

These four questions give you a clear path from where you are now to where you want to be. They become your roadmap for the next three to five years.

A real-life example

Goal: work with leading experts across industries, not just entrepreneurship.

- What to be known for: scaling personal brands that convert across different niches.
- What to do: work with experts outside your current niche, such as musicians, scientists and artists.
- What to learn: when entering a new niche, study it, its audience and its specific characteristics in depth.

This creates a clear three-to-five-year planning horizon.

Exercise 2.1 · Your four questions

Exercise 2.2 · Do you need a brand right now?

CHAPTER 3

“Do something epic”: how authority builds a brand

A personal brand isn't built through words alone. Actions and results build it. Before you teach, you need to do.

A brand’s potential is limited by your achievements

Here's an important, uncomfortable truth: your personal brand's potential depends directly on the significance of your achievements. If you haven't done anything remarkable yet, your audience will sense it. No amount of polished content can fix that.

Too many people try to create a brand without a foundation of real experience.

Three reasons why “epic” matters

Authority cannot be claimed

It is earned. People follow those who have already done what they want to do themselves.

Content without achievements is empty noise

You can say all the right things, but without evidence they aren't convincing.

Doing something epic gives you content to talk about

When you do something exceptional, you don't have to invent topics.

Example: a 6.5-hour course

YouTube rather than sold, as most people would do. That was an epic action.

- Most people sell this kind of content for several thousand dollars
- The course was made freely available to everyone
- The result: 53,000 email subscribers, with traffic still coming in a year later

> **"I don't know if there are any other crazy people in the room who have seen that course, but we released a free 6.5-hour course on YouTube. It is still getting 3,600 views in the last 48 hours, almost a year after release."**
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Are you an expert or a teacher?

This is an important distinction. You can be an excellent practitioner and still be a poor teacher. Billie Eilish is a brilliant performer. That doesn't automatically make her a good music teacher.

Moving from individual practitioner to teacher takes separate work: you need to learn how to break down what you do automatically into skills, actions and tasks you can pass on to others.

Don't pose as an authority without a basis for it. It's a toxic position and a losing competitive strategy.

How to show up while you're still learning

If you don't have major case studies yet, that's not a disaster. It calls for different positioning:

> “I’m acting as a proxy for you. I'll spend the money and time, make mistakes, burn bridges and figure things out, so you can learn from my experience without going through all of that yourself.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

That's an honest, powerful position. You are sharing a journey, not acting as a guru. It earns respect and trust.

Exercise 3.1 · Achievement inventory

Exercise 3.2 · An epic action

PART II

Positioning

Contrarian beliefs, the two-column method and inspiration beyond your niche.

CHAPTER 4

strongest way to stand out

There are three ways to stand out in any niche. Two are good. But the first is by far the most powerful.

Why most brands blend together

Open YouTube in entrepreneurship, marketing or investing. You'll see the same faces, the same sets, the same blue-and-red backgrounds, bookshelves and artificial plants, and the same messages. Why? Everyone copies what seems to work. It's an imitation of success, and it makes everyone invisible.

Brands that truly take off in education don't do it because of titles, thumbnails or hooks. They do it because they have a fundamentally different worldview and a different perspective on their industry.

What a contrarian belief is

You have a contrarian belief when you see something in your industry that most people accept as true, but you fundamentally disagree with it.

It doesn't mean being contrary for its own sake. It means having an honest, deeply held belief that distinguishes you from most voices in your field.

A contrarian belief isn’t a tactic. It’s your real perspective, shaped by years of experience. It has to be genuine.

Three examples of successful contrarian beliefs

EXAMPLE 1

Optimize for trust, not virality

comes before a transaction and creates a strong brand.

EXAMPLE 2

Gary Vee and Facebook

From 2007 to 2010, Fortune 500 companies were spending their budgets on TV commercials, billboards and direct mail. Gary Vee said, “There's this crazy thing called Facebook, and it's going to be huge.” At the time, that was radically contrarian.

EXAMPLE 3

Cody Sanchez and boring businesses

From 2018 to 2022, the dominant idea was that the only way to wealth was to become a tech startup founder. Cody Sanchez said, “Here's a crazy idea: you can get rich as a plumber.” Boring businesses as a path to freedom. The result was one of the fastest-growing personal brands in entrepreneurship.

EXAMPLE 4

Savage Fenty (Rihanna)

Victoria's Secret dominated the lingerie market by promoting one body type. Savage Fenty arrived with a contrarian belief: lingerie is for every body. The brand was valued at more than $3 billion in under three years.

A contrarian position in any niche

The scale can vary. You don't have to change an industry. A contrarian position can be niche-specific:

Videographer: “Everyone says to use zoom lenses for vlogging. I think prime lenses are better.”

other videographers.

A contrarian belief in HOW you show up, not just what you say

A contrarian belief isn't only about your words; it's also about your presence. Look at what everyone in your niche is doing and do the opposite.

For example: videos filmed on a Harley-Davidson in the mountains, or from the back of a pickup truck. Visually, that's the complete opposite of a talking head in a studio with a blue background. It also expresses a contrarian worldview.

Exercise 4.1 · Find your belief

Exercise 4.2 · The authenticity test

CHAPTER 5

The two-column method: find your unique perspective

Can't put your contrarian belief into words? Here's a simple, powerful tool.

How the two-column method works

This tool solves a key problem: most people understand that they need to be unique, but can't answer “unique in what, exactly?”

The method is simple:

COLUMN 1 · WHAT ANNOYS ME

- Cringeworthy or awkward
- Unethical or hypocritical
- Boring or predictable
- Misleading to the audience
- Off-putting enough to turn people away from the topic

COLUMN 2 · THE OPPOSITE

Write the exact opposite of each item in the first column. That's your position.

An example in practice

You're entering the real estate niche. You're irritated by the awkward agent who films dancing videos and points at on-screen text.

- Column 1: Staged, theatrical videos. Fake energy.
- Column 2: Natural communication. Talking like a friend. The real you.

That's already positioning: “Real estate without the theater”.

Another layer: industry truisms

Beyond competitors, look at old industry clichés that everyone repeats like a mantra but nobody has tested.

For example: “All publicity is good publicity.” People have repeated it for decades. But it's false. There are hundreds of examples of bad publicity destroying reputations. If you work in PR or branding, that's a ready-made contrarian belief.

You don’t need to invent a contrarian belief. You need to discover it by noticing what frustrates you in your niche.

Exercise 5.1 · The two-column method

Exercise 5.2 · Hunting for truisms

CHAPTER 6

Don’t copy your niche. Look elsewhere for inspiration

One of the strongest ways to stand out is to look where nobody else in your niche is looking.

The imitation trap

Here's how most creators develop:

1. Watch a leading player in the niche.
2. Start copying their style, formats and tone.
3. Become a second version of that person.
4. Wonder why the audience chooses the original instead.

When you only watch competitors, you'll always be number two at best. You're reproducing something that already works for someone else, rather than something unique to you.

The right sequence

At the beginning, copying is normal and even necessary. It's how you learn the basics. But you need to move to the next step quickly.

1 **Copying**

2 **The lazy dead end**

Most people stop here and keep copying.

3 **Your own voice**

Start bringing in your own preferences and perspective.

The winners move to phase three by looking for inspiration beyond their niche.

Where to look for inspiration

Look for content formats and presentation ideas everywhere except your own niche:

- Video games: content packaging, titles, thumbnails and top YouTube examples
- Tech reviews: structure, presentation and storytelling
- Automotive content: visual presentation and emotional engagement
- Comfort creators: gently delivered advice and lifestyle elements

The main principle: find ideas backed by data, meaning they already work in another context, but haven't appeared in your niche.

Example: tier-list videos in HR

Nobody in HR had made tier-list videos ranking HR software by quality. The format came from gaming. Someone applied it to HR and saw views increase by two to three times.

They didn't invent a new format. They took a proven format from another industry and became the first to use it in their own.

The comfort creator trend

affirming tone. It's a response to the oversupply of aggressive motivational content telling you everything you're doing wrong.

You don't need to copy their messages, but their presentation and tone can inspire you.

Exercise 6.1 · Inspiration outside your niche

Exercise 6.2 · The competitive landscape

CHAPTER 7

Visual identity: an Easter egg that works over time

Colors and visual style aren't your brand. They're elements of it. And in the first year, they matter very little.

The biggest early waste of time

People just starting a personal brand spend weeks choosing a color palette, fonts, a logo and a visual identity. That's a mistake.

In the first year, visual identity doesn't move the needle. It won't bring you an audience, create trust or drive conversions.

Your substance works first: worldview, contrarian beliefs and case studies. Visual style begins working later, when you have an audience that can remember it.

How visual identity works

But once you know the universe, you start recognizing and appreciating it.

For example, use one signature color intentionally, again and again. When your audience sees it, they begin thinking of you. But that only happens after repeated exposure.

> **“It matters and doesn’t matter at the same time. At the beginning, it’s an Easter egg. At the end, it’s an anchor.”**
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Don’t spend your first year on a brand style guide. Use that time to create content with a genuine position.

When visual identity starts working

Visual identity becomes meaningful when you already have an audience that regularly consumes your content. Only then does consistent use of color, type and style begin creating an association.

Exercise 7.1 · A minimal visual identity

virality

Views aren't a brand. What really happens before a purchase.

CHAPTER 8

Why optimizing for virality kills your brand

Virality is great. But if it becomes your north star, you're building a castle on sand.

The difference between views and a brand

Here's an uncomfortable truth: you can get millions of views on TikTok and YouTube without building a strong brand.

The algorithm shows content to people interested in it right now. But when the algorithm changes, nobody searches for you by name. Nobody deliberately visits your channel. You created content for the algorithm rather than a connection with your audience.

> “Views ≠ brand. Trust = brand. They aren’t mutually exclusive, but they don’t mean the same thing.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Many people go viral once and spend the rest of their lives trying to recreate that moment. It's the worst strategy.

After a viral breakthrough, the right next step isn't to go broad again. It's to go deeper with the people who found you and earn their trust.

The influencer-teacher problem

A familiar scenario: a creator spends years making viral videos in their niche, then launches a course on going viral. The problem:

- The content needed to build trust as a teacher won't go viral.
- The audience attracted by viral content isn't the audience buying education.
- You've set a standard you must constantly repeat, but it won't help you convert.

What makes someone a great practitioner doesn't automatically make them a great teacher. They are different skills.

You need to decide: are you building a media business or a brand? They are different games with different metrics.

Exercise 8.1 · Audit your metrics

CHAPTER 9

Trust as the currency that comes before a transaction

their wallets.

How trust works

Trust always comes before a purchase. Even when you buy a bottle of water, you trust at some level that it will be good quality.

In education, this is especially powerful:

1. Your audience consumes your content passively.
2. They start applying your advice and getting results.
3. They associate you not with someone else's success, but with their own.
4. When you present an offer, you no longer need to persuade them.

They know: “When I follow what this person says, I get more than I put in.”

Growth on both sides of your business

This system works in both directions. It speeds up every interaction with your audience:

- Client acquisition gets easier because people trust you before the first call
- Hiring gets easier because the best people want to work with those they trust
- Sales get faster because you don't need to convince people, only remind them

> **“Trust speeds up everything in business: the front end, acquiring clients, and the back end, building a team.”**
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

The free content paradox

money, you'll have MORE buyers, not fewer.

Why? Because high-quality free content demonstrates:

- The depth of your expertise
- Generosity and confidence in your method
- The real value of what's behind the paid offer

Give your best work away for free. It doesn't reduce the value of your paid work. It builds so much trust that the paid offer sells itself.

Exercise 9.1 · Trust-level audit

Exercise 9.2 · Something epic for free

CHAPTER 10

Case studies as your main tool for scaling trust

99% of content that truly converts is case studies, simply presented in a modern format.

How a case-study archive works

If you want to build trust through content, create case studies. Not three dull bullet points on a website, but a vivid, modern presentation.

1 Situation

2 Action

What did you do? Specific steps.

3 Result

What happened? A measurable outcome.

That's it. This is content that converts.

Why case studies work so well

When you regularly show situations where your approach worked, your audience starts associating you with those results. That's intentional pairing.

Stages of association:

- Stage 1: Your audience associates you with general success stories.
- Stage 2: Your audience applies your advice themselves.
- Stage 3: Your audience associates you with their own personal success.
- Stage 4: Trust reaches its highest level. “I get more than I put in.”

Case studies when you don’t have case studies

Starting from scratch with no client stories? No problem:

- Your own results: what worked in your personal practice
- Other people's stories: analyze public cases and why one brand grew while another failed
- Documenting your journey: “I'm doing this and sharing the results”

The key is to do it regularly, consistently and with specific details.

Exercise 10.1 · Your case-study bank

PART IV

Content strategy

The 75/20/5 split, two games and your weaknesses as an advantage.

CHAPTER 11

The 75/20/5 formula: a content structure that works

How to divide your content between depth, reach and personality, and why this ratio isn't arbitrary.

Three types of content

All educational content falls into three categories. Success lies in the right balance.

75% In-depth content

Examples:

- Detailed case studies with specific information
- Step-by-step instructions and strategies
- Mistake breakdowns and lessons from failures
- In-depth interviews with experts

20% Niche-wide content

Content that serves your ideal client but also interests a broader group within your topic. They may not buy now, but you want to keep them in your world for the future.

For example, a video called “If you're struggling to create content, watch this.” It interests CEOs building personal brands, but also anyone who wants to create content.

5% Personal content

Not separate videos about your life. Instead, personal moments woven into your main content: your interests, quirks and traits within professional topics.

Take Casey Neistat: he shares one key message during a run, then in the office, then in a taxi. One lesson runs through the whole day. His personality is woven into his professional content.

Personal content isn’t separate videos about your life. It’s you woven into professional topics. 75 Hard isn’t a separate series; it’s the backdrop while you talk about marketing.

This ratio provides:

- Deep trust with your target audience (75%)
- A steady flow of new audience members (20%)
- Human connection and memorability (5%)

People buy from people they trust. They also buy from people they feel connected to. This formula gives you both.

Exercise 11.1 · A 75/20/5 content plan

CHAPTER 12

Playing for breadth vs. playing for depth

Every piece of content does one of two things. Confusing these games is the worst thing you can do.

Two strategies

Every piece of content you create plays either for breadth or for depth.

Playing for breadth

Goal: reach as many people as possible, attract a new audience and increase awareness.

Success metric: views, reach and new followers.

Playing for depth

Goal: deepen your connection with your existing audience, build trust and convert.

Success metric: DMs from the right people, email-list growth and sales conversion.

Content type: niche-specific, specialized content for a particular audience segment.

Why you shouldn’t mix them up

Most creators make content for depth, then get upset about low views. Or they make content for breadth, then get upset that it doesn't convert.

The solution: before creating each piece, ask “Is this playing for breadth or depth?” Then measure it with the appropriate metric.

A practical example

A video on managing a media team plays for depth. Its TAM, or total addressable market, is tiny: CMOs at companies with media teams. Expected views are very low.

But views aren't the success metric. The quality of DMs is. If five to ten marketing directors write “That was brilliant,” the video has won.

Decide which game you’re playing with EVERY piece of content and measure only the relevant metric.

Exercise 12.1 · The breadth-and-depth matrix

CHAPTER 13

Your weaknesses as a competitive advantage

What you consider a weakness may be exactly what makes you unique.

The jiu-jitsu principle in business

There's a principle in jiu-jitsu: “You roll, then I roll.” Whatever you give me, I use as an advantage. What you see as my weakness, I turn into my weapon.

This applies directly to personal branding.

Example: camera anxiety as a content strategy

Imagine you're terrified of the camera. You're self-conscious about your appearance and feel awkward on screen. Most people hide it.

An alternative: lean into it. Show it. Talk about it. Whenever you feel awkward, acknowledge it out loud.

What happens:

- Your audience finds you human and approachable.
- People relate because they are also afraid of the camera.
- You become one of them, rather than an expert on a pedestal.

The comments start mentioning approachability and connection. That's no accident; it's the result of intentionally using a weakness.

Authenticity as a differentiator in the AI era

As the world shifts toward AI-generated content, genuine humanity becomes the most valuable asset. Anyone can generate information. Nobody can generate you.

what can't be copied.

> “The more I show myself, my quirks, my mannerisms and all of it, the stronger my competitive advantage. That’s what cannot be reproduced.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Exercise 13.1 · Your weakness inventory

Exercise 13.2 · Your unique mannerisms

PART V

The journey and realistic expectations

36 months, three phases of finding your voice and staying true to yourself through trends.

CHAPTER 14

How long building a brand really takes

One of the most honest conversations missing from the personal branding space.

36 months without financial expectations

Here's the truth: enter this game without expecting your desired financial results in the first 36 months.

It sounds harsh. But it's the kindest advice you can give. Only with those expectations can you handle the inevitable highs and lows calmly.

Here's what happens to most people:

1. Nothing, nothing, nothing.
2. One thing takes off.
3. Nothing again.
4. Panic. Disappointment. They quit.

Those who set a 36-month horizon survive these setbacks and eventually win.

The low-expectations strategy

It sounds counterproductive, but it works. Set yourself tiny, almost ridiculous minimum goals. Then, when reality exceeds them, you'll feel energized rather than stressed.

For example, before launching a free course that cost about $17,000 to produce, the goal was modest: 1,000 views in the first month. “I'll be happy with any thousand.” The result far exceeded that mark, creating huge motivation to continue.

This isn't about lacking ambition. Your ambitions should be high. It's about managing expectations for a specific project.

Your effort doesn't matter to the audience. How hard you worked isn't important. What matters is whether they get value.

Strategic metrics for niche content

If you intentionally create niche content for a small but valuable audience, don't measure success in views. Choose another metric:

- DM quality: did the right people reach out?
- Conversion: did they take the next step in your funnel?
- Reputation: are you being invited to the right platforms?

Exercise 14.1 · A realistic horizon

Exercise 14.2 · A resilience system

CHAPTER 15

From copying to finding your own voice

Copying is a normal starting point. Getting stuck there is a fatal mistake.

Three phases of development

Every creator goes through three phases. Knowing which one you're in is essential.

PHASE 1

Learning through copying

PHASE 2

The lazy dead end

Most people reach a basic level of quality and stop. They keep copying the leading player because it works. It's the trap of always being number two.

PHASE 3

Your own voice

The winners move into phase three. They begin to:

- Look beyond their niche for inspiration
- Bring in personal preferences and unconventional approaches
- Create a unique style that can't be copied exactly

Where to look in phase three

Once you've mastered the basics, stop drawing inspiration from your niche. Look at successful examples in other fields. The proof that a format works already exists, just in another niche.

You bring a proven format into your niche and become the first to use it. That's a huge advantage.

Exercise 15.1 · Assess your development phase

CHAPTER 16

How to stay true to yourself while chasing trends

The most dangerous trap is creating content for the algorithm rather than for your audience.

Trends vs. worldview

Trends are what works today. Your worldview is what will keep working.

People who optimize their content for trends create commodity content. Millions of views, no brand. When the algorithm changes, they disappear.

People who build content around a consistent worldview create a brand. Their audience seeks them out deliberately.

A question to check yourself

Ask yourself regularly:

> **“Can people who regularly watch my content name my contrarian belief? Do they know what I stand for? Or am I just another creator?”**
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

If your viewers can't say how you're different from other creators in your niche, you haven't built a brand yet. You're just creating content.

Practicing consistency

Repeat your contrarian belief again and again, in every video and every post, using different words and examples.

That's why it feels as though you need to say the same thing over and over: you do. That's how an association is created.

Exercise 16.1 · The consistency test

CONCLUSION

Your next step

You've reached the end. That already sets you apart from most people, who read the introduction and a chapter or two, then put the book aside.

But this book is a beginning, not an ending. The real work starts when you close these pages and open a notebook.

Four priorities for the next 30 days

1. Answer the four Brand Journey Framework questions honestly and specifically.
2. Define your contrarian belief using the two-column method.
3. Build a bank of ten case studies and start using them in your content immediately.

4 Plan an epic action: something you'll release for free that others sell.

A reminder for difficult days

There will be days when it feels like nothing is working. Nobody is listening. Maybe you're not the right person for this.

On those days, reread your “why” from exercise 14.2. Remember that the journey takes 36 months. Keep going.

A personal brand isn't a sprint. It's a marathon won by those who keep doing the right things for long enough.

> “If you take nothing else from this book, answer one question: what do you see in your industry that most people agree with, but you don’t? That’s your competitive advantage. You don’t need anything else.”
>
> CALEB SIMPSON

Good luck. Do something epic. Build trust.

WORKBOOK

24 exercises and worksheets

notebook. Exercises follow the chapter order.

EXERCISE 1.1

The association formula

Chapter 1 ↑

Write answers to the following questions:

1. What do people associate me with right now?

Be honest: what would clients, colleagues and acquaintances say about you?

2. What do I WANT people to associate me with?

3. The gap between (1) and (2):

4. What will I intentionally pair myself with to close that gap?

EXERCISE 1.2

Audit your current branding

Chapter 1 ↑

Rate each item from 1 to 5:

- [ ] **Relevance:** what I communicate matters to my target audience [ ]
- [ ] **Consistency:** I do this regularly and systematically [ ]

Total score: ____ / 15

What needs improving first?

EXERCISE 2.1

Your four questions

Chapter 2 ↑

Answer honestly, without rushing. This is the most important work in the book.

QUESTION 1

What is my ultimate goal? What do I want my personal brand to make possible?

QUESTION 2

What do I need to be known for to achieve that goal?

QUESTION 3

What do I need to DO to become known for that?

What do I need to LEARN to do it?

My planning horizon: _____ years

EXERCISE 2.2

Do you need a personal brand right now?

Chapter 2 ↑

Answer the questions below. If most answers are no, it may be better to focus on achievements rather than content for now.

- [ ] I have a clear goal for building my brand — YES / NO
- [ ] I have experience or results that my audience values — YES / NO
- [ ] I'm ready to invest time, money and vulnerability — YES / NO
- [ ] I understand what I want to be known for — YES / NO
- [ ] I have the resources for content: time, a team and energy — YES / NO

Conclusion:

EXERCISE 3.1

Inventory your achievements

Chapter 3 ↑

Now choose two or three that are most relevant to your audience:

These will form the basis of your authority in your content.

EXERCISE 3.2

Plan an epic action

Chapter 3 ↑

What could you do in the next 90 days that would be epic for your niche?

What do most people NOT do because they sell it, keep it private or are afraid to offer it for free?

My epic action:

Why will this matter to my audience?

EXERCISE 4.1

Find your contrarian belief

Chapter 4 ↑

Step 1. Think of three to five things that irritate or anger you in your niche.

What do most people say or do that you deeply disagree with?

Step 2. Choose the strongest one, something you can speak about with genuine passion.

Step 3. State your contrarian belief in one sentence:

“Most people in my niche believe that

but I'm convinced that

».

EXERCISE 4.2

The authenticity test

Chapter 4 ↑

Answer these questions about your contrarian belief:

- [ ] Do I genuinely believe this, rather than being contrary for its own sake? YES / NO
- [ ] Can I talk about it for hours with real passion? YES / NO
- [ ] Do I have experience or data that supports this position? YES / NO
- [ ] Is this belief specific to my niche, rather than a generic cliché? YES / NO

If every answer is YES, this is your contrarian belief. If any answer is NO, keep looking.

EXERCISE 5.1

The two-column method

Chapter 5 ↑

My niche:

WHAT ANNOYS ME	MY POSITION

My main differentiator based on this analysis:

EXERCISE 5.2

Hunting for truisms

Chapter 5 ↑

List three to five established truths in your niche that you question, and explain why you think they're wrong:

Choose one as the topic for your first contrarian video or post.

EXERCISE 6.1

Find inspiration beyond your niche

Chapter 6 ↑

Explore three niches far from your own and find formats that work.

NICHE 1

What works there / how to apply it here

NICHE 2

What works there / how to apply it here

NICHE 3

What works there / how to apply it here

EXERCISE 6.2

Analyze the competitive landscape

Chapter 6 ↑

Look at five leading creators in your niche. Note who they are, what they do and what NOBODY is doing.

CREATOR	WHAT THEY DO	WHAT NOBODY DOES

The unoccupied space I can fill:

EXERCISE 7.1

A minimal visual identity

Chapter 7 ↑

Define the MINIMUM visual elements you need:

Primary color

Just choose one. You don't need a full palette

Typeface

One for headings, one for body text

Photo tone

Warm / cool / neutral / black and white

How you appear on camera

Studio / street / nature / office / on the move

Remember: this isn't final. It's a starting point that will evolve.

EXERCISE 8.1

Audit your current metrics

Chapter 8 ↑

Check what you're optimizing for right now:

- [ ] I measure success in engagement: comments and replies YES / NO
- [ ] I measure success in leads and inquiries YES / NO
- [ ] I measure success in conversions: sales and email signups YES / NO
- [ ] I measure success in audience quality: who reaches out YES / NO

My main metric right now:

My main metric SHOULD be:

Hint: if you're building a brand to convert, use a trust metric such as email-list growth, DM quality or sales conversion.

EXERCISE 9.1

Audit your audience's trust

Chapter 9 ↑

Assess your audience's current level of trust:

1 Do people DM you to thank you for your content? YES / NO / RARELY

2 Do they apply your advice and share their results? YES / NO / RARELY

3 Do they recommend you to friends and colleagues? YES / NO / RARELY

4 Do you have loyal supporters, not just followers? YES / NO / RARELY

5 Is it easy for people to decide to buy from you? YES / NO / DON'T KNOW

EXERCISE 9.2

Plan something epic for free

Chapter 9 ↑

What could you release for free that most people in your niche sell?

Course / guide / webinar / detailed case study / template / checklist

Idea

Format

Scope

Potential value for your audience

Delivery deadline

EXERCISE 10.1

Your case-study bank

Collect ten case studies you can use in your content.

Type: personal result / client result / analysis of a public case

1 **Case study / type**

Situation / result

2 **Case study / type**

Situation / result

3 **Case study / type**

Situation / result

4 **Case study / type**

Situation / result

5 **Case study / type**

Continue on a separate sheet for case studies 6–10.

EXERCISE 11.1

A content plan using the 75/20/5 formula

Chapter 11 ↑

Plan 20 pieces of content using the formula:

75%: in-depth content, 15 pieces

Add another eight on a separate sheet.

20%: niche-wide content, four pieces

5%: how I'll weave personality into professional content

My interests

EXERCISE 12.1

The breadth-and-depth matrix

Chapter 12 ↑

Take your last ten pieces of content and categorize them:

CONTENT	GAME	THE RIGHT METRIC
	☐ Breadth ☐ Depth	
	☐ Breadth ☐ Depth	
	☐ Breadth ☐ Depth	
	☐ Breadth ☐ Depth	
	☐ Breadth ☐ Depth	

Which type of content dominates, and does it match your strategy?

EXERCISE 13.1

Your weakness inventory

Chapter 13 ↑

Write down what you consider your weaknesses in public, and how you could turn them into an advantage.

1. Weakness

2. Weakness

How to turn it into an advantage

3. Weakness

How to turn it into an advantage

One thing I'll start showing instead of hiding:

EXERCISE 13.2

Your unique mannerisms

Chapter 13 ↑

List five to seven things that make you who you are:

Habits, perspectives, ways of speaking, unconventional opinions and lifestyle

Which should you add?

EXERCISE 14.1

Set a realistic horizon

Chapter 14 ↑

Answer honestly:

My horizon without financial expectations: _____ months

Recommended: at least 18–36 months

Resources that let me work without income from my brand:

If I don't have those resources, how I'll earn money ALONG THE WAY:

My tiny minimum goals for the first three months:

- [ ] Views: at least _____ per piece of content
- [ ] Followers: at least _____ by the end of the quarter
- [ ] Email list: at least _____ people

EXERCISE 14.2

Build a resilience system

Chapter 14 ↑

What will help you keep going when nothing seems to work?

- [ ] **Long-term vision:** I remember why I'm doing this
- [ ] **System:** I publish on a schedule, regardless of results
- [ ] **Community:** I have people on the same journey
- [ ] **Tracking:** I track progress that isn't visible from the outside
- [ ] **Other:** _____

My personal “why”

Write it down and keep it. You'll reread it during difficult moments

EXERCISE 15.1

Assess your development phase

Chapter 15 ↑

Which phase are you in right now?

best practices.

- [ ] **Phase 2.** I can make decent content, but I'm still copying the same people.
- [ ] **Phase 3.** I'm actively looking beyond my niche for inspiration and developing my voice.

What I need to do to move to the next phase:

EXERCISE 16.1

Test the consistency of your worldview

Chapter 16 ↑

Review your last ten pieces of content:

- [ ] Does each reflect my contrarian belief, directly or indirectly?

Count: _____ out of ten pieces reflect my worldview

If fewer than seven out of ten do, you've drifted. Adjust your course.

My contrarian belief, written here as a reminder:

APPENDIX

Master checklist and key concepts

Use this list to track your progress.

Part I · Foundations

- [ ] 1.1 The association formula
- [ ] 1.2 Audit your current branding
- [ ] 2.1 The framework's four questions
- [ ] 2.2 Do you need a brand right now?
- [ ] 3.1 Achievement inventory
- [ ] 3.2 Plan an epic action

Part II · Positioning

- [ ] 4.1 Find your contrarian belief
- [ ] 4.2 The authenticity test
- [ ] 5.1 The two-column method
- [ ] 5.2 Hunting for truisms
- [ ] 6.1 Inspiration beyond your niche
- [ ] 6.2 Analyze the competitive landscape
- [ ] 7.1 A minimal visual identity

Part III · Trust vs. virality

- [ ] 8.1 Audit your metrics

- [ ] 9.2 Plan something epic for free
- [ ] 10.1 Your case-study bank

Part IV · Content strategy

- [ ] 11.1 A 75/20/5 content plan
- [ ] 12.1 The breadth-and-depth matrix
- [ ] 13.1 Your weakness inventory
- [ ] 13.2 Your unique mannerisms

Part V · The journey

- [ ] 14.1 Set a realistic horizon
- [ ] 14.2 A resilience system
- [ ] 15.1 Assess your development phase
- [ ] 16.1 The consistency test

Key concepts

- ✓ Branding = intentional pairing + relevance + consistency
- ✓ Brand = the by-product of effective branding
- ✓ Contrarian belief = your main differentiator

your position

Trust comes before a transaction. Virality doesn't.

99% of converting content = case studies in a modern format

Content formula: 75% in-depth / 20% niche-wide / 5% personal

Every piece of content plays for breadth or depth. Don't confuse them.

Your weaknesses = your competitive advantage

Horizon without financial expectations: 36 months

A FINAL MANTRA

truth. Repeat it again and again.

Trust the process.

@highlightbrandlab, join us

Source: Brand Journey Framework © Caleb Simpson. All concepts, quotes and frameworks in this book are based on Caleb Simpson's original system, drawing on his 17 years of experience building personal brands.