

We've moved on to Series 2. [Read it here.](#)

Series 1 - Episode 4 - Instinct. 15th Dec 2022.

Eyes where we wanna go, let's go there.

I've had a mad 6 weeks. Staring down the barrel of a cash flow squeeze is fun. Two businesses and two cashflows make for really leaning into the "trust me" part of "trust me, let's go on an adventure".

Work has kicked off. The odd bit between everyone knowing what they are doing, your calendar exploding into pieces, and the first invoices being sent out. It feels a bit like alchemy. I'm pretty sure we can turn this random collection of materials into gold. But, shieet. Be nice to see some gold soon.

Robin Sloan's [New Avenues](#) has been doing the rounds. It's absolutely lush. I wrote to Anna early on about how the industry feels to me at the minute. I look at stuff and think, is this *really* it?

At times the last few years have felt like pushing through a crowd at a festival that is going to a bigger stage to see a well-established band, but I'm cutting through them to go to another stage with a band that makes me feel more alive.

I feel confident as this is how I felt in 2007. Waves come and rise over 15 years. UCD, in its current guise, got productised and commodified. That's great. It's got democratised and mainstreamed. Power to everyone's elbow. Some days I want to revel in the classics. But mostly, I hate the feeling of nostalgia. Let's push things forward. It's what I'm good at. Remain endlessly curious, hopeful and confident.

But honestly, my mind is elsewhere. The Venn of work and life has been a circle for a long while. Probably unhealthily so. But again. That is where I'm at. Every time I go to take a shot, something random snaps at my ankles like an angry small dog. C'mon world. Can I just catch my breath and focus on one thing at a time?

I'm surrounded by good people who I love. When life yanks me in all directions, I can fall into their arms. When I'm slightly spun about and can't get my bearings, I look at the people around me and simply go in the direction they point.

I will come up for air eventually, and having trusted the people around me, I know I will end up nearer where we want to go.

Look after each other. It's nicer that way.

Peace

Eliot

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Series 1 - Episode 3 - Work. 29 Nov 2022.

I keep my side of the street clean.

When the rubber hits the road. Two weeks, two kick offs for St Giles and St James. Late last week, a bit of unexpected work showed up, so new it doesn't have a code name yet (St Luke? Q3's theme is accidentally Catholic saints; why not lean into it and canonise another project?). Is this thing on? If you're feeling in control, you're not going fast enough.

We're starting to find the things that don't scale. Two people is different to three, and three is different to five or six. Stuff has started to break. Can't skip standup and forget to tell anyone when it's not convenient anymore. No more to-do lists in Google Docs, we're all on [Linear](#) now. Back to enjoying the sensation of putting things in the 'Done' column.

We got warned off from starting a consultancy last week after taking nascent ideas to a trusted third party for some advice. "You only start a consultancy if you're tired." Maybe, but nah. There are things I'm tired of in the world of work but I don't think I'm tired, objectively. More hopeful, actually. Being small enough and nimble enough to make things like [Arts Funding](#), knowing enough people to spin up a team on St Luke within 24 hours. We don't know how to describe what we do in a way that scales, and that feels ok for now. The first 8-10 projects are pure experiments as far as I'm concerned. How we work, what work we do, who we work with. Iterate our way to a strategy by following our noses. I trust that we have good taste, so that's the really hard bit sorted. Following our noses works if the bills still get paid, and for now, we're good on that front. Just have to make sure that revenue isn't the only thing we measure. Easy to go that way. Harder to pull yourself out of it.

While this is all accelerating I'm trying to make sure I watch out for some things, quietly. (Remember Paul Ford from Postlight's brilliant blog post, [Irony doesn't scale](#)? He introduces the concept of 'quiet alert'. That's me). How much attention do we really have. How do we ensure we do the work we really want to do, not just the work we have done before. Which bits are about to break, which bits do we need a system for.

Christmas wasn't on my radar at all and yet suddenly it's in every conversation I have. This is what we can do before Christmas. It's X weeks until Christmas. I don't think your team will be working over Christmas, so we'll ramp down our effort over that time too. The coward's way out of saying, sorry pal, we're downing tools for a fortnight. Q3 imminently over. Someone pick a better theme for Q4's projects, please.

AG

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Series 1 - Episode 2 - Money. 14 Nov 2022.

Be helpful. Be compassionate. Increase courage.

On Monday evening last week I was listening to Front Row on Radio 4, which was focusing on Arts Council England (ACE)'s recent funding round for 2023-2026. [Sir Nicholas Serota](#) from (ACE) was flailing; Stuart Murphy, the CEO of the English National Opera, was [incensed](#) (paywall). A friend in the sector then told me that it was almost impossible to find out which organisations hadn't been awarded ACE funding in this round, but had got some before. I got a bit cross about it, all of it - that the ENO were so blindsided by the funding decision, that hundreds or thousands of people working in the sector sat there looking at two spreadsheets side by side trying to figure out what's going on, who's keeping their jobs, where's all the money going.

"I am a visitor here, I am not permanent" is ringing round in my head ([Hype Machine](#) mid-2000s crew where you at?). Maybe it's not my role to have opinions about a sector I don't really work in. But let's use a bit of annoyance and a bit of insider knowledge and a bit of momentum to do something productive.

Eliot and I were together (in person!) as I was texting my mate about her data comparison difficulties. "Shall we just ask [Jaye](#) to do a thing?" "Yeah, I'll write a Google Doc." Push each other over the ship-it cliff. Increase each other's courage. Anyway, here's the [Arts Funding tool](#). Have a play and let us know what you think.

A creative collaboration in late 2022 is an exercise in increasing courage and increasing trust. Learning how to trust and care about other people. Moving beyond the transactional - do work, get paid - and into enthusiasm and compassion. We're rebuilding those muscles after two years of being told to be self sufficient, look after your own, walk in the road when someone's out for a run and coming towards you.

"Next time contracts will be closed so less time for navel gazing", Eliot said last week. Yeah right. Jumping off a cliff with someone else is a leap of trust and we each had the wobbles at least once. "Your bank account has more money in it than mine, the cashflow spreadsheet says we're good but will I still get paid?" "Yeah of course, and these new contracts are in *your* name". "Whose thing is this? Is it yours or mine or both of ours?" "Look, if you trust that person on that project, I don't know them, but I trust them because you do."

Retros help. And time together in person. And - no surprises - actually starting the work. [Kim](#) is working on St Giles. Do you know what a difference it makes to have someone with an actual delivery management background in the mix? We're looked after and looking after each other. Finding the path between reckons and feelings and dark matter and getting it done. And making and shipping a thing, dammit, it always makes you feel better.

AG

Series 1 - Episode 1 - Almost. 31 October 2022.

We all trust each other, so how do we make money flow through this thing?

Almost almost *almost* closed St Giles and St James'. It's a bit where you start to bank the trust built up over months, and in some cases, years. Everyone into their starting position, I'm *pretty* damn sure this thing is going to happen. Can everyone let us know before they agree to other work? Let's agree to do no more work till it's all agreed. Shall we send a prodding email? Nah, desperation stinks, let's chill out. We are good.

What promises have been made? What expectations have been set? What's the politics of the situation? How much money is involved?

We had a few good conversations with good people about being honest, open and compassionate about what they need to know and why. Come on an adventure with us, it'll be fun. The games involved in estimates, proposals, project plans and day rates always feels someone is trying to get something over someone else - and like energy better spent somewhere else.

That courageous and slightly chaotic element needs to stay. Let's not start work knowing exactly where it will land. There is enough of that already. Feel your way to a fine balanced point. Just enough information and trust to proceed.

Looking back, that's what made [Fragments](#) work. Stick to the formula until it breaks.

There is a lovely bit in [Bill Clinton's eulogy for former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl](#) where he describes the process involved in letting go in order for something to grow. "Nothing captured this more than his willingness – in spite of the enormous weight of German culture and history and the contribution it was making to the European Union – to give up the first leadership of the Central Bank. It was just natural. We have to learn to share."

The work scales at the speed of trust. I love eulogies, they look for and find the best in people.

Have returned to how we explain what we do a couple of times. And the language we use. I still love the idea that [marketing can't abide complexity](#). Which is ironic as much of the

work to date is sitting with complexity and making it more accessible. Nerdiest normy in the room, normiest nerd in the room. Anyway; leaving that one to percolate.

Next time contracts will be closed so less time for navel gazing.

Peace.

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Series 1 - Pilot. 18 October 2022.

Let's be honest, a newsletter is just a fancy term for an email.

Notes as a tool for communicating, not for press releasing. Or maybe a bit of both.

We (that's [Anna Goss](#) and [Eliot Fineberg](#)) did a project together in the summer and it went well. We decided we created more value together than we do on our own. And we have a nicer time. So we'll do some more.

The past two or three weeks have been spent in productive boredom, trying to get a couple of projects over the line, and beginning to converge on some shared vocabulary, tools, and cashflow spreadsheets. We still run two different businesses, but we've started to ask each other the kinds of questions you might ask your business partner ("Am I ok to spend £600 on a screen and a keyboard and a mouse?"). Maybe at some point in the future we'll run the same business. There are enough shared principles - for another day, not for now - and overlaps in the Venn that it seems like it would make sense.

Productive boredom is almost over. Next up is actually starting to plan the work - we're signing the statement of work for St Giles tomorrow, and St James' in the next week or two. We're trying to figure out how to bring some other people along for the work we have locked in for the next couple of months so that we can continue with our other commitments and the strand we've named 'cultivate', aka new business, alongside delivering St Giles and St James'. Bringing other people along doesn't necessarily just mean 'this is the day rate', because we'd like to believe there's more to it than that, there's a value to the hanging out and making something new, but there's also a risk too if you commit too high and too long and the pipeline doesn't manifest itself into invoices.

So. We are finding the way through risk, value, enjoyment, and trying to do something that feels fair to all involved. No one here is (knowingly) building anything to sell, so we can try some different approaches to running a business. The strategy is to create more value than we cost for clients, or users, or whoever is paying for. To use whatever insider knowledge we have from our combined 25 odd years of working on the internet - that's the coded way

of saying we're both in our 30s - to pay our mortgages. And to try and leave things better than we found them for whoever might be implicated by our work.

Both onwards and upwards. Let's try that. 🙌

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