

How to Use the Success Secret of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, and Google

By Ed Gandia

A few years ago, Warren Buffett was asked what his advice would be for young people today. His response:

" ... to invest in themselves."



Ed Gandia

I couldn't agree more. As a freelance professional, **you** are your product. And in order to stay ahead of the game and deliver the best ideas and solutions for your clients, you must continually update your knowledge base and improve your personal effectiveness.

Yet I'm constantly amazed at how few writers and copywriters deliberately set aside a percentage of their income every year to learn a new skill, develop new strategies, get practical advice and guidance, and improve their mind, body, and soul.

The 2% Solution

And you know what? It doesn't have to be a huge amount. Even 2% of your gross income would give you access to programs, events, books, and information that will help you become a sought-after and top-paid professional.

And on a more personal level, this level of commitment could also help you make improvements that extend way beyond your business.

Say your gross annual income from this past year was \$50,000. Investing 2% of \$50,000 would give you \$1,000 to work with.

You can buy a lot of useful knowledge, ideas, and advice for \$1,000.

And unlike other purchases that lose their value, a smart investment in yourself can pay dividends for years — dividends that compound quickly ... and dividends that no one can take away, not even the IRS.

As Benjamin Franklin once said, "If a man empties his purse into his head, no one can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."

But it's not just about money. You must also invest your time and energy to implement the ideas you learn.

Here again, investing just one hour a day, five days a week, reading quality books and information — and implementing ideas from these materials — will make a HUGE difference in your business over the course of a year.

What Would Google and Edison Do?

Google is a great example of this concept. Their top leadership knows that investing in their employees pays off. That's why they have a policy called "Innovation Time Off," where engineers are encouraged to spend 20% of their work time on projects that interest them.

Through this program, Google is asking its engineers to invest time creating, inventing, brainstorming, and learning.

This may sound like a lot of fluff and a waste of valuable resources. But HALF of Google's new product launches have been conceived during employees' "Innovation Time Off." These innovations include Gmail, Google News, AdSense, and others.

Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor in American history and arguably one of the most brilliant business minds ever, had an incredible thirst for ideas and information. According to Michael J. Gelb, author of *Innovate Like Edison*, the inventor believed that reading was critical to self-improvement:

"He used reading as a means to bootstrap his way to new knowledge in the areas that supported his goals ... He never began a round of experiments without first reading everything available on the subjects of his studies."

Gelb also noted that Edison used reading as a way to "cross-train" himself in multiple disciplines, using books as a pathway into new fields of endeavor.

Bottom line: Freelancers who skimp on professional development are only cheating themselves.

It shows in their constant battle to land quality clients and top-paying projects. It shows when they struggle to get good referrals from current and past clients. And it shows in their inability to earn the income that will allow them to have the freedom and flexibility they truly want.

What Should You Invest In?

I realize that this advice may come across as a bit self-serving. After all, I publish a number of business-improvement programs and offer a coaching program.

So, yes, I do benefit when you invest in my stuff.

But I'm NOT writing this to ask you to buy my programs or to invest in my business launcher. I'm talking about **a gradual, multifaceted commitment to improving yourself and your business** — regardless of whether you invest in my own programs or someone else's.

Only *you* can determine what resources are best suited for you.

And, in fact, you should take a much broader view when considering which resources to invest in. Specifically, I would look into books, courses, and information in these three areas:

- Personal development
- Business improvement
- Improving your craft

Personal Development

This area encompasses everything from health and fitness to mindset mastery, creative thinking, personal relationships, parenting, and even personal hobbies and interests.

What does all this have to do with freelancing? Everything! Because in order to perform at peak levels in your business, you must invest in the personal facets of your life:

- Your body
- Your mind
- Your soul

Your Body

I don't have to tell you that keeping yourself in good physical shape is critically important. We all know this, but the pressures of running a solo business often keep us from taking the time to exercise and eat right.

Frustrated by the mountains of conflicting "health and fitness" information out there, I recently started researching a number of health improvement strategies that would work better for me. I bought and read a number of books. I took notes and experimented with a few different strategies. And I settled on a plan that's finally yielding results.

This area is a challenge for me. I'm a home cook, which means that I love to eat great food. Sometimes *too much* food! I know that about myself, so I have to be careful and find ways to combat bad habits and replace them with healthy habits and attitudes.

Your Mind

It's important to read about things that interest you. *But don't just stick to the usual topics.* Pick up biographies of interesting people you're not familiar with. Read publications you don't normally flip through. Learn a new language. Pick up a new skill or hobby.

Some of my recent favorite reads:

- [The Wright Brothers](#) by David McCullough
- [The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics](#) by Daniel James Brown
- [The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph](#) by Ryan Holiday
- [Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die](#) by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (re-read it again this year because it's so good!)
- [The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business](#) by Charles Duhigg
- [80/20 Sales and Marketing: The Definitive Guide to Working Less and Making More](#) by Perry Marshall

This past June, I called my grandmother on her 90th birthday. I told her that she may be 90, but I think her mind is as sharp as it was 20 years ago. She laughed, but she knows I'm right.

When I asked her how she keeps her mind in top shape, here's what she said:

"First, I leave the house every single day to do something fun. Second, I spend at least one hour a day working on some type of puzzle."

Hmmm ... having fun and challenging the mind with a few games. I think Grandma is onto something here!

Your Soul

By "soul," I'm referring to a few things. First is mindset mastery. Sure, it's easy to stay confident and upbeat on days when life is filled with roses and sunshine. It's when the storms roll in (and they *will* roll in) that your mental toughness will be put to the test.

Some freelancing storms you're sure to go through (if you haven't already) might look like this:

- That long and lucrative streak of work, the one that seemed as though it would last forever ... ends.
- That favorite client of yours who thinks you're the best thing since the invention of the iPhone suddenly begins to send less and less work your way.
- Your bank account takes a nosedive.
- Your group of friends (or much worse, your spouse) begins looking at you with unmasked nervousness, as if to say, "Hmmm. This freelance thing of yours isn't going as well as planned, is it?"

In the face of all these things, what do you do?

You need to be prepared. And you do that by investing your time and resources in learning how to weather these storms safely. And how to use them to grow stronger, both personally and professionally.

Weathering these storms also requires that you work on **spiritual development**. I'm not talking about religion here, although if you're a person of faith, practicing your religion definitely falls into this category.

But regardless of your religious beliefs, I've found that investing in your spiritual development and adopting a habit of [daily meditation](#), prayer, and/or visualization is absolutely key.

I've learned that this daily habit will help you develop an even greater sense of purpose in your life. It will encourage a more positive view of your future. And it will enable you to face personal and business challenges more effectively.

Business Improvement

You may be a solo business, but even a business of one has several key functions that must be continually evaluated and improved.

My good friend Pete Savage talks about eight different "departments" that you run (whether you are aware of this or not) when you operate a successful freelance business. Here they are:

1. **Sales.** This, of course, is what you do to earn money. It involves reaching out to and having conversations with

prospects and customers.

2. **Marketing.** This is how you make yourself known to potential prospects who may have a need for your services, now or in the future.
3. **Operations.** The actions you go through each day to support your craft. This includes the systems you have in place that enable you to perform your craft more easily. Scheduling your time, writing quotes for clients, managing workflow that you do yourself or perhaps outsource to assistants and subcontractors ... all are part of the operations department.
4. **Human Resources.** This is the department responsible for training and developing employee skills. Besides skills development, other HR issues include the decisions you make in terms of setting office hours, planning vacation time, and maintaining work/life balance.
5. **Customer Service.** This department is responsible for ensuring that you treat your clients right. How can you "go the extra mile" for customers and reap the rewards? How do you deal with clients who don't like your work? These are all Customer Service policies.
6. **Production.** Production is the factory floor. Think of your freelance business as a factory with a "capacity of one." Wait, you might say, isn't this a rather demeaning way to look at things? To take all your creative, inspired freelance work and say that it came out of a factory? Not really. Even the most beautifully crafted and artistic products in the world (think of Rolls-Royce cars, diamond rings, and fine wines) leverage production efficiencies.
7. **Finance and Accounting.** Understanding how money flows in and out of your business is critical.
8. **Research and Development.** This department is all about embracing change in your business and using it to your advantage. Research involves looking for and finding new ways to enhance your business; development is about bringing those enhancements to life so you can profit from them.

When you break your business out into these eight functional areas and look closely at each one, suddenly you can identify those areas in need of attention.

If you notice that a department in your business is underperforming, fix it. Invest in resources that can help you in that department. And commit to spending the time necessary to implement the needed changes or modifications.

Improving Your Craft

Steady marketing efforts can work wonders for your business. But if you're not continually improving your craft, even the best marketing and sales skills won't save you in today's competitive environment.

Oh, and don't think that talent alone will do it. The market is full of talented writers and copywriters struggling to make ends meet. If talent alone were the secret, most would be extremely busy, earning a great living.

Don't get me wrong, talent is a big plus. **But these days, you need much more.**

You need to stay on top of your profession. That means learning new skills. Taking courses. Reading up on important developments, strategies, and techniques. Going to select conferences. And exchanging ideas and best practices with trusted colleagues.

Also, pay close attention to developing trends. Where is the market heading? Where are client budgets shifting to? What projects are you suddenly being asked about the most? What's getting a lot of buzz? What technologies or services are moving beyond hype and into the mainstream?

Adjust your training and development budget as you see where the market's heading and where the emerging needs are.

Here are some ideas:

- Attend one conference every year that will help you learn new skills, ideas, or strategies.
- Attend quality webinars (free and paid) from sources you trust that will give you new tools, ideas, or perspectives.
- Read and study industry trend reports to stay on top of new developments and potential opportunities.
- Read one or more publications from your target market every week. Not sure how to find them? Google the term "[name/description of your target market] + magazine."
- Join or start a mastermind group (local or virtual) with like-minded colleagues. Commit to meeting at least once a month.
- Join an active forum or a LinkedIn/Facebook group in your target market and become an active participant.
- Commit to reading at least one book per month that's related to your craft or target market, or to growing your business.

Your takeaway for today: Never shortchange yourself. *You* are your most important asset. *You* are what clients "buy." So make a commitment this year to invest a reasonable percentage of your income in your personal and professional development.

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1 Response to "How to Use the Success Secret of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Edison, and Google"

All right and good you really make sence with this

Guest (Afolabi) – over a year ago

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