

The Confidence *Trick*



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Conviction is a record.

PAUL REGAN

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For the creatures.

The Best Story Wins.

Prologue

This is not a memoir.

A memoir is what you write when the story is over and you want applause for surviving it. This is a knife. Short, sharp and deadly. It's designed to cut the bit where you still think confidence will save you.

If you're a founder or a CEO walking into Turing Fest, Bits & Pretzels, or Slush in Helsinki, any room that prices you in the first four minutes, any board that already smelled the blood... this is for you. If you are still polishing the deck while the room has already decided, this is especially for you.

Here's the distinction the industry will not sell you, because the industry sells costumes:

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

One gets you through the door. The other keeps you handcuffed in a chair with the fluorescent lights on full beam, while someone looking suspiciously like Christopher Walken is yelling at you, asking what you what the fuck you actually mean. Most people confuse the two. They buy the blazer. They hire the coach who buffs the swagger. They rehearse the laugh. Then they wonder why the clap arrived and the money did not.

I learned it the expensive way: thirty years as one of satan's foot soldiers as an executive creative director running the business in multinational advertising agencies from, Hong Kong to Sydney to Bangkok to London. I bought the look before I owned the job. Gold card. Church's. More front than Harrods. It worked until it did not. Then the real work started: the story that makes the right people arrive already convinced.

That is the machine underneath this book. Not hacks or affirmations or LinkedIn theatre. The move from Act 2 to Act 3 - from taking the hill to building something that outlasts the applause, all without pretending Jung will save your Series A.

You will not get a cheerleader. You will get scar and craft. What the costume cost. How attention is the first honest test. How ego dilutes even when the craft is strong. How proof is not tribute. How you stop performing and write the record.

The best story wins.

Not the loudest. Not the prettiest. The one that sounds like the truth because it is the truth, finally said out loud and in order.

Turn the page.

Authenticity is everything. Once you can fake that, you've got it made.

01 - The Confidence Trick

Mayfair does not care if you're a fraud.

It will sell you the costume anyway.

I didn't have the American Express Black Card - the one with no credit limit, the one that whispers you're already the man. I had Gold. Good enough. I melted it through the West End like a sailor on crack on shore leave... in Bangkok. Cesare Paciotti on the feet. Yves St Laurent pinstripe in depleted uranium. Turnbull and Asser silk pocket squares, and I was suddenly in the market for a gentleman. Ties I had no business owning. Don't get me started on the ties.

I wasn't shopping.

I was buying a Creative Director.

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

I learned that the expensive way. The Essex Boy's way, if we're being honest - more front than Harrods, look the part until the room believes you, then pray the work catches up before the mask slips. I was a good student. Still am.

Singapore, '88. That was the start - Southeast Asia, advertising, the long game. By '93 I was in Hong Kong, JWT, one of the proper agencies. Making money. Winning things. Working hard enough to look busy and drinking hard enough to look alive. Copywriter. Group Head. Good at the words. Not yet the man who ran the room.

Then Grey called. Jakarta. Creative Director.

On paper it was a coup: the jump every writer wants and half of them never get. Off paper I knew almost nothing about being a Creative Director. The craft of the title. The politics. The bit where other people's livelihoods hang off your taste.

I took it anyway.

The honest reason, the one I didn't put on the resignation, was simple. If I failed, nobody would see. Indonesia was far enough that I could come home with a story. Blame the market. Blame the clients. Blame the flunkies, if I needed something ugly enough to shut the questions down. Failure with an alibi. That was the deal I made with myself.

An old bald American with a devastatingly beautiful news anchor girlfriend hired me. Good businessman. Not particularly obsessed with whether the work was any good - which, if you're a fraud ascending, is almost a kindness. I had a mate in the network I thought might fish me out if I went under. I flew in, met the man who actually ran the asylum. Bob. He went through Creative Directors like underwear. Psychological disorders that would have kept a Swiss clinic in ski chalets for generations. More about him later. Or never. Some people are a warning, not a chapter.

And JWT?

I handed in my notice like a man lighting a cigar on a burning building. My boss had stopped me going on a shoot in the Maldives for a script I'd written. Yes, I had actually done the classic "open on a desert island." Beach, sun, surf, the whole postcard - because we were "too busy." Fuck you for the rest of eternity. Spite is underrated as a career counsellor. It gets you on the plane when courage won't.

There was kudos in it too. Money. And the stories: Jakarta as Asia's best-kept secret for nightlife. Spoiler. It was. You think Bangkok is mad. Boy.

Before I flew, my head said the quiet part out loud.

You're not a Creative Director. You'd better start sounding like one.

So I did what confident men do when the record isn't there yet.

I bought the record's clothing.

Two grand on the Bond Street theatre. Then a two-day management course with a pair of dodgy trainers I found advertised in the back of Private Eye - men who teach you to run a meeting as if you're giving odds on the favourite at Cheltenham. Not how to be the job. How to look and sound like the job. A short course in performed authority.

I arrived in Jakarta already acting.

The costume does more than get you through the door. It lets you hold the eye.

I've been practising that the street with big men around London- hold contact eye contact, break last. Much easier when you're well dressed. People read the cloth before they read the man. High-confidence move. Also a stupid one if you misread the room. Push comes to shove, they don't usually swing first. There's a beat - who the fuck do you think you're looking at? And if they're drunker than you, you can still quiet it. Drop the eyes. Bullshit. Live. But hold too long with the wrong hooligan and you run the risk of getting the shit kicked out of you. Yes, it's dangerous. That's good. Danger means the room still has stakes. The trick men forget: looking is not the same as having a reason to look back.

It ended in tears. That is not a metaphor. That is the minutes.

I did a decent enough job, in the way a man can do a decent enough job while taking three-hour lunches and knocking off early because that was the weather in our industry then. I don't flog myself for the lunches. Everyone floated the work in on a wing and a last-minute prayer. Advertising is built on that particular bullshit. You can look busy for months and invent the ad on a Thursday night and still collect the award in the spring.

What I didn't have - what I didn't even know I was missing - was the distinction.

Doing the job.

Looking like I was doing the job.

I had collapsed them into one thing. The suit, the shoes, the fountain pen and the watch. The voice in the meeting. The title on the card. Confidence as a trick that gets you the room. And for a while the trick works. It gets the yes. It gets the flight. It gets Bob to hire you before he burns you like the last one.

There's an old story I like, it's about Lycaon, King of Arcadia. He tried to see whether Zeus was really a god by serving him human flesh at dinner. (Only an alcoholic would think of that.) Zeus less than impressed and turned him into a wolf. The moral is not subtle. The wolf did not come from outside. It was what the king already was, made visible.

Same with the Creative Director costume. The trick did not invent the hollow man. It only dressed him.

Then the trick meets a man who eats Creative Directors for breakfast, and the costume doesn't have enough body inside it, and you get removed. With extreme prejudice.

Here is what it cost. Not the title. Not Jakarta. Not even Bob.

Integrity.

From that moment on I got very good at looking. Less good at being. The performance fed the insecurity. The insecurity fed the addiction. The addiction fed the craving for status - another card, another suit, another room that would clap for the man who sounded finished.

Confidence without a record is a beautiful drug. The industry will sell it to you in Mayfair daylight and call it ambition.

I am not proud of the trick.

I am precise about it.

Because founders do the same thing every day with better lighting. Deck theatre. LinkedIn swagger. Raise cosplay. The Anthropic hoodie or the navy blazer and the voice that says we've got this when the record is a spreadsheet and a prayer. Performed confidence. No record underneath. It gets the meeting. It gets the money. Sometimes it even gets the headline.

Then it gets the bill.

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

If you can't tell which one you're running, you're already in Jakarta. You just haven't met Bob yet.

You can't outperform your identity. Your performance is only as strong as the boundaries of who you think you are.

02 - Same Machine

"Let me have a crack at it," said Terry Suhana.

Charming Eurasian ad man. One of my early mentors in Singapore. Nickname: the Piranha. Not for no reason. He could go through cash, secretaries, and account people like a knife through butter and always come out smiling. Drove a yellow Ferrari around Singapore like he owned the place. Complete villain. You knew it the minute you met him. We loved him anyway.

"Look, it's like this," he said, offering career advice to someone who'd asked. Radical candour from old piranha chops.

"It's really simple. Lie to everyone in private."

I'd been in the game five or six years by then. No virgin. Still shocked me.

Advertising really is the devil's business.

Plain and simple: get people to buy stuff they don't need, and can't afford to impress people they don't like. That's the job. When I came up, we were honest about it. We were entitled wankers wanted a good time, a shit-tonne of money, and a load of fun doing it. The industry has since got woke and stuffed with people who place a premium on looking virtuous. Same wankers. Better tech. Worse parties.

How do you keep a cocaine-fuelled long-lunch of a career going?

You pitch.

A pitch is not a seminar. It is a mating dance with invoices.

Say Coca-Cola is looking for an agency. Whatever reason - incumbent gone soft, procurement wants blood, new CMO needs a scalp. They long-list eight or ten shops. A few chats. Chemistry meetings, if they're posh: an hour of smiling to see if anyone fancies anyone. Then three or four get invited to the formal dance. They issue a brief. Your job, supposedly, is to crack it and win the business.

At least that's how it's supposed to work.

Here is the fundamental thing - the thing half the agencies on earth still fuck up, even today:

The pitch is not for them to like the work.

It is for them to like you.

In any sphere of intellectual or creative consulting - Accenture, Droga5, BBDO, McKinsey - there's never any doubt that you can manufacture an elegant, cerebral solution to a client problem. The work is the easy bit. The trick is always selling it. People buy from people. We like to pretend business-to-business is logic, intellect, considered decisions. Wrong. Dead wrong.

We are primates with car keys.

So the machine runs like this.

'Rumble.' Credentials. Case studies. The cattle-call. Prove you've done something that looks like their something.

'Chemistry.' Do we fancy each other. Can we stand a three-year marriage. This is where the Piranha smiled

and the room forgot what he'd eaten.

'Shortlist.' Three or four left standing. Brief drops. Speculative creative begins - unpaid theatre, mostly. Strategy decks. Money decks. War rooms that smell like a school locker married to a meat locker. All-nighters. The A-team pulled off real clients to invent a fake marriage for a stranger.

'The room.' Beauty parade. Dog-and-pony. Call it what you like. One agency after another, same hour, same boardroom, same stale biscuits. Ogilvy hated contests of more than four. "I like to succeed in public," he wrote, "but to fail in secret." [Who does that remind you of? He still died a thousand deaths before every presentation. Sensible man.

This is where the costume does its work. Hawaiian shirts for a holiday client. Boardroom dressed as a pub for a beer brand. Hired extras so the agency looks busy. M&C Saatchi once pitched British Airways out of a small dingy office because they didn't have a real one yet. Someone always points at Ferraris in the car park. Someone always rehearses the laugh.

Neil French became my mentor.

Late eighties, early nineties - the Ball Partnership in Singapore - he was incandescently famous. Advertising people would spend whole dinners talking about him, his work, and nothing else. Alan Watts coined the phrase 'irreducible rascality.' French might have been the man he was thinking about.

Neil knew the game colder than most. Bypass the brand managers. Go straight to the organ grinder. Anyone who got to the top, he reckoned, had to be a bit of a crook - and crook recognises crook. Then flattery, persuasion, sheer manipulation. He called it acting. A mate once told him: You're acting all the time, you bugger. Music hall taught him the rest: you don't sing a song - you sell it. Same for a client presentation. Work the audience. Make them believe they're having a good time. They'll hang on every word.

'The yes.' Or the no. Or the silence while procurement weighs your day rate against someone else's.

Then the A-team vanishes to the next parade, and the B-team inherits the marriage.

A confidence trick runs on the same rails.

Shortlist the mark. Chemistry. A story that feels inevitable. A performance that makes them like you before they inspect the record. The elegant solution is almost beside the point - any competent shop can sketch one. The sale is primal. Status, fear, belonging, the relief of deciding.

Pitch and con are not cousins.

They are the same machine in different lighting.

One ends in a contract and a retainer.

The other ends in a bill the mark didn't know they were signing.

The difference... when there is one... is whether a record ever shows up underneath the performance.

Most of the time, nobody checks until the tears.

Self-esteem is the emotional immune system.

03 - Record vs Performance

There's always a faster gun in town.

If you're a creative, you know it in your bones. Someone younger, sharper, cheaper, hungrier. So I did what confident men do when the record feels thin.

I went and got an MBA.

The logic was clean, in the way Act 2 logic always is. Creative with an MBA. Category of one. Something the other creatives didn't have. Something that would make me feel safer with clients - safer meaning: look like I belonged in the room where the money sat.

I already had a trick for that room.

I'd go and see a client dressed like an investment banker, copy of the Harvard Business Review under my arm. Carried it everywhere. Didn't matter what was inside. It was a prop. It said: I know something about business. Performance. Not record.

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

And while we're naming the disease: René Girard - mimetic desire. We don't want things. We want what the other wants. That's advertising. That's politics. That's most of life. The Rolex only works because someone else already wanted it. Essex boys players want a Rolex. City boys want a Patek. Acknowledge him and move - the rest of this chapter is what happens when the borrowed wanting becomes the whole self.

Baudrillard had a nasty little name for the next stage of the same illness.

Simulacra and Simulation. The copy that replaces the original until nobody can find the territory under the map. Hyperreality: signs of wealth, signs of power, signs of arrival - circulating so hard the real thing becomes optional. You're not rich. You're wearing rich. You're not powerful. You're performing power. The representation ate the thing.

Advertising makes that weather for clients. Same rule as anyone who sells narcotics:

Don't get high on your own supply.

Early in my business I was talking to a creative director. She told me about a client's Hong Kong Chinese accountant, a man with no poetry and perfect eyesight, who had taken the piss out of her.

"You people in advertising," he'd said. "You think you're rich? Just because you go to nice restaurants and nice hotels, you can afford to buy nice clothes. You think you're rich? You think you can buy and do and see the things rich people do? You can't. You're not rich. You just think you are."

Hysterical. And accurate.

Because walk into a room in a Rolex Submariner stacked with diamonds and sapphires. Great Frog jewellery. Church's brogues, limited edition. A six-hundred-dollar belt buckle from Virgin Saints & Angels. Bespoke suit or a Pal Zileri blazer. Superfine 200s on your back. Haircut from the Mandarin Oriental barber. Drinks in the right rooms. The club memberships. The cufflinks. The silk pocket squares. The whole persona.

You don't know if I'm worth a million, ten million, a hundred, or five hundred. You can't gauge it from looking. You can't even gauge it from talking. We all go to almost the same places, give or take. Same

restaurants. Same hotels. Same theatres of arrival.

That's hyperreality.

The costume is so complete the original becomes unknowable - including to the man wearing it.

Most founders don't know which one they're running - record or performance.

They've already done something hard. Act 1: get your shit together enough to build, start, and keep a business alive. No mean feat. Most outfits blow up or implode early... the graveyard is crowded. Get past that, hit three, four, five years, and you're one of the happy shiny people. Warrior mode. Call to adventure answered. Quest underway.

Maybe you've even won the prize.

Here's the bit Joseph Campbell in The Hero's Journey won't let you skip: winning the prize is not the end of the story. You got the girl - then the ex gets out of prison. You killed the dragon - it wasn't dead. You got the job, the car, the career, the money.

Getting it is one game.

Keeping it is another.

They're in the keeping-it phase. Act 2. And they don't even know they need an Act 3.

The skill set, the story, the attitude - the person you are in Act 2 - has to evolve into something built for long-term survival. Warrior to wise king. That's the bridge. Most people look for a shortcut instead.

I know, because I lived in the shortcuts.

Stuck in Act 2 without the clarity that Act 3 was required, I collected quick fixes that "worked".

That's the addict engine, if we're being honest. Immediate gratification over delayed. I don't want the hard thing. I want the magic bullet - something that solves it painlessly and easily. An MBA lecturer I quite liked once sat down in a leadership module and said, "Managing people is really hard work." I freaked. Don't fucking tell me that. Not what I came for.

So I reached for the costume instead:

The Harvard Business Review under the arm.

The wardrobe. The cufflinks. The suits.

The Mandarin Oriental barber.

The drinks. The club memberships.

The posturing. The connections. The politicking.

Jewellery, shoes, girlfriends, friend group - the full ersatz self.

A show of confidence designed to impress other primates with car keys.

Same machine as Mayfair. Same machine as the beauty parade. Different lighting. The MBA was not evil. Learning is fine. The lie was what I wanted it for: a costume that would pass for a record. Safety theatre. Status as substitute for substance. High on my own supply.

Coke, charm, and an alarming lack of scruples will carry a man a long way in Act 2.

They will not get him through Act 3.

My Act 2 ended when I got sober and had to admit the performance had run out of road. Act 3, for me, began as a spiritual life - first the principles of recovery, then the commandments of Christ. Not a brand. A record I had to live, daily, whether anyone was watching.

Your Act 3 will not look like mine. It will still demand the same trade: stop performing the man who has arrived. Become the man who can keep what he got.

Founders confuse record and performance every day with better slide templates.

Deck theatre. LinkedIn swagger. Raise cosplay. The new threads and the voice that says we've got this when underneath is a spreadsheet and a prayer. They buy the prop. They carry the journal. They hire the coach who polishes the costume. They wonder why the room clapped and the business still hollowed out.

Performed confidence without a record.

That is the enemy. Name it once and you start seeing it everywhere - including in the mirror. Baudrillard would call it the simulacrum. I call it the Confidence Trick.

The athlete wants the body admired. The warrior wants the hill taken. The statesman - the wise king - wants something that outlasts the applause. Pop psychology hangs that ladder on Jung; the labels barely matter. What matters is this:

Act 2 confidence gets you the meeting.

Act 3 conviction keeps the kingdom.

One is a performance.

One is a record.

If you can't tell which one you're building, you are still carrying the magazine under your arm - Rolex catching the light - and praying nobody asks what you're actually worth.

Who's writing your story? You? Or is some twisted puppeteer, past script or parent pulling your strings?

04 - What It Cost

What it cost me was almost everything.

Integrity. Sanity. Happiness. Most of the relationships around me. I became, if we're being precise, sociopathic in tilt - concerned with myself over others. I loved things and used people. I could not regulate my own emotions, which is how you end up a raving cocaine addict who could put an alcoholic to shame.

Of course I didn't see any of this as abnormal. Addicts never do. I was inside the insanity - driven by ego, gain, self, narcissism. Terrifying cocktail.

And it helps you get on in advertising.

I didn't like myself. I couldn't trust myself.

I was amoral enough to call it philosophy. I told myself it was because I was French - more front than Harrods, villain as brand, the old Asian-ad debauchery worn like a medal. I read The 48 Laws of Power and Machiavelli's The Prince like they were scripture. Occult nonsense. Tarot. Voodoo. Witch doctors. Spells on people. A raving pagan with a company card.

No peace. Constantly at the mercy of emotion, lust, desire, ambition. Massive ego welded to massive insecurity - the ugliest double act in the building. I told myself I didn't like lying. What I liked was worse: embellishing the truth, leaving bits out, working the facts like Play-Doh. Clever, I thought.

I was also a cunt.

The women were part of the bill. A string of very bad relationships with very dodgy partners - another stage on which to perform, another mirror that never showed a record. Love as acquisition. People as supply.

That is what the Confidence Trick costs when you live inside it long enough. Not a slap on the wrist. A hollowed-out man who still photographs well in a Rolex.

The Big Book talks about Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Every alcoholic who reads that page recognises himself. Perfectly decent man by day. Something else by night. The worst of it is not the transformation. It is the morning after - when the man wakes up in the wreckage and has to look at what the creature did in his name.

Two natures. One body. No custody agreement.

I was that morning. Often. The suit was Jekyll. The night was Hyde. Advertising clapped for both until one of them owed a bill the other could not pay.

When people ask me what the most terrifying experience of my life was, I often say the Hong Kong Jockey Club presentation.

Careful with the name. The Hong Kong Jockey Club. Not a riding school. Not a hobby. The Club.

It sounds spurious. It isn't. I'll tell you why.

Around 1996 - final days of the Empire. Height of my drinking and using. Tailored suits. Haircuts at the Mandarin. Buying my coat from the 14K triad. All of it a great look from the outside.

We had to present to the Hong Kong Jockey Club. Chinese like to bet - a lot. In a city already obscenely rich, the Club was the richest institution going. That year alone, betting turnover was about HK\$80 billion. The old colonial joke had an order of power: the Hong Kong Jockey Club, then the bank, then the

Governor. They weren't kidding. (Today the Club still takes well over HK\$300 billion in wagering and lottery a year and remains Hong Kong's largest single taxpayer. Same appetite. Bigger machine.)

For reasons that still feel godforsaken, we went with a tech agency that promised a simulation: early-days computer animation of what the activation area would look like. Small deal. We thought we were clever.

The tech failed us. We were something like three hours late presenting to the Hong Kong Jockey Club.

Sitting in the room was our agency chairman - Eurasian, charming, the sort everyone called nice. I knew different. Under the disposition: vampire. Nickname in my head, and in a few others: the Black Widow. Chairman of JWT for Hong Kong and China. Losing face in that room. I cannot begin to tell you how pissed she was. I knew how vengeful she could be. I knew I was in the shit.

All I could think was: I know you don't like me. You think you've got me. Yeah - you've got me. What can you do?

The only thing that kept me upright was knowing I could leave for the Second Friday Club. Been going since the Empire started. First Friday was the governor and the heads of department. Second Friday was the number twos and the cronies. We got pissed, then went to the Wan Chai girly bars for the usual debauchery. That was the plan. That was the escape hatch.

Push came to shove. I left. I drank with my buddies from one o'clock. Paralysed drunk. Had a good time, as far as that goes.

What it proved - and this is the bill, not the anecdote - is that when I can't out-cool, out-bamboozle, or out-dazzle a room of people exponentially richer than me, I've got nothing.

Costume. Performance. Empty man with a Mandarin haircut waiting for the girly bar.

That is what the Confidence Trick costs when the tech dies and the Black Widow is watching and the only oxygen left is the piss-up.

Here is what I refuse now.

I refuse to run on ego alone.

I refuse the kind of independence that is really just isolation with better branding - self-reliance that cuts God out of the operating system. I refuse a life without spiritual practice. I refuse a life without discipline. Discipline equals freedom. An old client, Jocko, used to say that. I did a treatment for him once. Like working with the god of war. He wasn't wrong.

I have Jesus. The Father. The Holy Spirit. Not as a brand asset. As the record underneath the performance. Faith that God can do for me what I cannot do for myself. He does the heavy lifting. He got me out of cancer. Out of depression. Out of alcoholism. He saved me from death. He saved me from hell. Gifts of the spirit - intuition, prophecy, the sense of being connected to a kingdom bigger than the one that hands out Effies and Ferraris.

That is Act 3, for me. Not a costume. A daily dependence.

Your refusal list will not be identical. It will still have to be real. Not a LinkedIn values slide. Not a recovery slogan you haven't paid for. A set of hard nos you keep when nobody is watching - especially when the old cocktail starts whispering that advertising, politics, and mimetic desire would like you to come back to the party.

Act I closes here on purpose.

Ch1: you bought the Creative Director on Bond Street.

Ch2: pitch and con are the same machine.

Ch3: record versus performance - Girard, Baudrillard, the HBR under the arm, the hyperreal rich.

Ch4: the bill, and the line you draw after it.

Warrior to wise king does not begin with a better deck.

It begins when the cost is named without swagger - and the refusals are kept.

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

I know what the performance cost me.

I refuse to pretend it was free.

We all live in the stories inside our heads.

05 - Attention

Before anyone buys, they have to care.

Not nod. Not download the deck. Care.

In Your Story Is Your Strategy I put it blunt: life keeps screaming three questions at founders - Who are you? What do you want? And the brutal one that actually decides whether anyone follows you:

'Why the fuck should I care?'

That is attention. Not vanity metrics. Not impressions. The moment a stranger's nervous system leans in. Without it, your Trinity is furniture. Your Six Beats are a script in an empty theatre. Your Conviction Story is a tree falling in a forest with the Wi-Fi off.

Act I named the disease: confidence as performance, conviction as record. Act II is the craft of building belief before the ask - so the performance has something real to stand on, or gets exposed.

I learned attention the unromantic way: advertising.

The job, stripped of awards and long lunches, is simple. You are the conduit between the enthusiasm of the client and the apathy of the consumer. The consumer does not wake up wanting your brief. They wake up wanting coffee, status, sex, safety, and not to feel like a mug. Your ad has seconds to interrupt that weather.

Same for a founder.

Your market does not wake up wanting your Series A narrative. They wake up drowning in other people's stories - Girard's borrowed wanting, Baudrillard's copies, LinkedIn's infinite beauty parade. If you cannot seize attention, you do not get to tell the truth. You do not get to show the record. You get scrolled past by primates with car keys.

Attention is not the sale.

Attention is the right to begin the sale.

In the strategic narrative work I later wrote down as six moves, the first move is almost always the same:

'Name the Big Change.'

Winter is coming. Say it out loud. A seismic shift - technology, behaviour, regulation, capital - that will remake the industry whether your prospect likes it or not. You grab attention by refusing the polite lie that tomorrow will look like yesterday with better fonts.

That is not hype for its own sake. It is hospitality for the nervous system. People pay attention when the ground moves. Stakes follow: winners and losers, adapt or perish. Then the enemy - the archaic practice, the incumbent mindset, the barrier. Then the promised land. Then the gift. Then the proof.

We'll run those beats properly in the next chapter. Here is the only point that matters for Attention:

Belief starts when you name a change big enough that ignoring you becomes expensive.

If your opening is features, you have already lost. Features are what you explain after someone cares. If your opening is "we're excited to announce," you are performing confidence into a void. If your opening is a Big Change the buyer already feels in their bones but hasn't had language for - now you have attention.

Now you have the raw material of belief.

Founders confuse attention with performance all the time.

They buy it - boosts, ghostwriters, a personal brand that looks like a Rolex Sub under boardroom lights. Hyperreal attention. The room looks at them. Nobody believes them. Same Confidence Trick, new channel.

Real attention is earned when your story matches a shift the market is already sweating. You are not inventing desire from nothing - mimetic creatures that we are, you are naming the wanting they borrowed from the future and giving it a spine. That is why "the best story wins" is not a motivational poster. It is an attention theorem. In a crowded room, the clearest true story about what is changing gets the lean-in. The costume gets the glance. The glance is not belief.

I have sat in enough pitches to know the difference. The agency that wins the beauty parade often won the hour before the work was shown - chemistry, reputation, the sense that these people see the same winter coming. The work confirmed it. Or didn't.

Belief is built before the ask.

The ask only harvests it.

So what do you actually do on Monday?

Stop leading with yourself. Lead with the change that makes your prospect's status unsafe if they stay asleep. Say it in language a human would use at dinner, not in a framework slide. Then shut up long enough to feel whether they leaned in.

If they didn't, you do not have an attention problem you can fix with a better logo. You have a story that has not yet touched their fear or their hunger. Go back to the Big Change until it does.

Other people have written whole books on the architecture of attention. Fair enough - the craft is real, and I won't pretend I invented the physics of the human gaze. What I am saying here is narrower, and meaner, and tied to the Trick:

Attention is the first honest test of whether you are building a record or mounting a performance.

A performance begs to be looked at.

A record makes looking away feel stupid.

Next we put machinery under that lean-in - the Six Beats, properly, so founders can run the sequence without drowning in mythology.

For now, hold this:

'Why the fuck should I care?'

Answer that before you ask for the money, the mandate, or the marriage.

Otherwise you are still the man with the magazine under his arm - hoping the room mistakes the prop for a pulse.

The most important story is the one you tell yourself, about yourself.

06 - Six Beats

Attention gets the lean-in.

Beats keep it.

In Your Story Is Your Strategy I laid out a strategic narrative in six moves. Andy Raskin popularised a cousin of this sequence for B2B. I run my cut because founders don't need Silicon Valley mythology - they need a machine they can rehearse before the ask, in the corridor, half-drunk on bad conference coffee, when someone says so what do you do?

Here it is, stripped for the Confidence Trick.

'1. The Big Change'

Winter is coming. Name the seismic shift - tech, behaviour, capital, regulation - that remakes the game whether they like it or not. This is the attention hammer from the last chapter. Without it, you are announcing features into fog.

If your Change could sit on any competitor's slide unchanged, it is not a Change. It is wallpaper.

'2. The Stakes'

Winners and losers. Adapt or perish. Make mediocrity expensive. If nothing bad happens when they stay asleep, they will stay asleep. Primates with car keys only move when status is at risk - their board's status, their spouse's dinner-party status, their own reflection in the mirror at 3am.

Paint the abyss and the mountain. Not "growth opportunities." Loss. Humiliation. Irrelevance. Then the opposite.

'3. The Enemy'

Not a cartoon villain in a cape. The archaic practice, the incumbent mindset, the sacred cow blocking the Promised Land. Girard again: desire needs a rival. Name what you are against so the room knows which tribe it is joining.

Bad Enemy: "legacy vendors" (everyone says that).

Good Enemy: the specific lie the market still believes - surveillance capitalism is the only web that pays, or a deck is a strategy, or confidence is enough.

'4. The Promised Land'

The future where the Big Change has been survived and the Enemy crushed - painted vivid enough to want. Not your feature list. Their new status. What Monday looks like when the story is true.

If you cannot see them walking into a room differently, you have not painted a land. You have painted a brochure.

'5. The Magic Gift'

Your product, method, or offer as the bridge from here to there. In Trick language: this is where performance dies or gets honest. If the Gift is costume - deck theatre, AI-slop adjectives, "platform that helps..." - the room will clap and not buy. If the Gift is a record you can defend under fluorescent light, belief thickens.

Peter Cranstone's Gift was not another privacy feature. It was 'UI for AI that upgrades the web' - privacy capitalism beating surveillance capitalism. One chantable sentence. That is a Gift. A feature dump is a hope in a hoodie.

'6. The Proof'

Case, receipt, corpse. Something that happened in the world. Testimonials, numbers, a named transformation. Laura: treatments up a notch, directors win jobs. Cranstone: patents and Do Not Track in the browsers. Sceptics do not yield to adjectives. They yield to evidence.

No Proof and you are still selling the costume. You have walked upstairs. You have not yet earned the walk back down.

Run them in order. Skip one and the story limps.

Founders usually reverse the machine. They open with the Gift (look at our platform), sprinkle Proof like confetti, never name the Change, and wonder why procurement shrugged. That is the Confidence Trick in narrative form: performing the ending before you earned the beginning. Bond Street for decks.

Advertising taught me the same sequence in uglier clothes. You do not sell the lager by listing IBUs. You sell the shift in the night, the stakes of being left out, the enemy of boredom, the land of belonging, the pint as gift, the proof of the crowd already drinking. Same machine as the con. Same machine as the pitch. Same machine as the Diagnostic when I ask market, value, then story last - because story without the first five beats is karaoke.

Difference: when the Gift and the Proof are real, you are building conviction. When they are props - HBR under the arm, Rolex as personality, eye contact with nothing behind it - you are still in Act 2.

The best story wins. Not the best product. Not the loudest confidence. The story that survives daylight.

'Wrong order (Act 2):'

We're an AI-powered platform that helps enterprises unlock synergies. Trusted by innovative teams. Book a demo.

Gift first. Proof as glitter. No Change. No Enemy. No Land. Confidence Trick in twelve words.

'Right order (enough to start):'

Buyers already feel the web was built to watch them, not serve them. Ignore that and you lose the next decade of trust - and the revenue that rode on it. The enemy is surveillance capitalism dressed as convenience. The land is a web that adapts to me with consent. Our gift is Choice - UI for AI that upgrades the pipes. Proof: the patents already sit in most browsers.

Same company. Different machine. One is costume. One can survive a Walken in the chair.

'Monday drill'

Write one sentence per beat for your company. Six sentences. Read them aloud to someone who does not love you. If Beat 1 does not make a smart stranger lean in, burn it and rewrite. If Beat 5 cannot survive a hostile CFO, you do not have a Gift - you have a hope. If Beat 6 has no corpse, you are still performing.

Do not tattoo the labels on the slides. Use the sequence. Hide the scaffolding. The room should feel a story, not a framework seminar.

Next chapter: the Trinity underneath the beats - Value, Market, Story - so the Gift is not random theatre but identity meeting demand.

From confusion to clarity and confidence then onto conviction.

07 - Trinity

Six Beats are the film.

Trinity is the camera, the location, and the lead.

In Your Story Is Your Strategy I called it the Holy Trinity: 'Value Market Story'. The Conviction Engine playbook is the same machine on paper - ninety minutes, a pen that doesn't skip, the honesty you'd rather give a sheet than a colleague. At the intersection sits the Conviction Story. Not a tagline. Not a mission statement nobody can recite. The story that converts a stranger into a client because it sounds like the truth - because it is the truth, finally said out loud and in order.

You can't outperform your identity. Your performance is only as strong as who you think you are.

Resist the urge to skip to Story. It's the most fun and the least useful without the groundwork underneath it. Same rule as the Diagnostic: story last.

'Value - Who are you?'

Underneath the LinkedIn headline. Identity work. Most positioning skips this and goes straight to messaging - which is why most positioning sounds like everyone else's. You can't write a convincing sentence about a person you haven't met, and the person you've avoided meeting longest is usually yourself.

Value runs three lenses - Experience, Expertise, Ego - stripped for the chapter that follows. The pivot that rewrote how you operate. The unfair advantage competitors have only read about. The invisible skill clients compliment that you thought was ordinary. The non-negotiable you will not trade for an easier invoice. Compress it into one paragraph that is not clever. True. That paragraph is the spine.

If Value is LinkedIn cosplay, every beat downstream is fiction. Act I's costume problem, made operational.

'Market - What do they want?'

Not a demographic. A person mid-crisis, scrolling at 11pm, who would pay real money for someone to make the next decision feel less like guessing. Your addict - my word - already converted in spirit, just needs the door. Job title, situation, what kept them up, what they're too proud to admit.

Pain. Mistake already made trying to fix it alone. Cost of waiting - money, time, face. Promised Land concrete enough to picture a Tuesday morning, not a vibe. Vague targeting produces vague marketing, and vague marketing is the most expensive kind: same budget as precision, none of the conversion.

Take the identity from Value and pressure-test it against real demand. Product-market fit is a story problem before it is a spreadsheet problem.

'Story - What weaves it?'

Where Value and Market stop being two worksheets and become one sentence someone else wants to repeat. The Six Beats running on purpose - Change, Stakes, Enemy, Land, Gift, Proof - told straight, none of them labelled on the slide. Best version sounds like you talking, not a brochure trying to.

Story without Value is empty theatre. Story without Market is diary.

The overlaps earn the fee. Most people stop at the three circles. Competitors never bother looking here.

- 'Value ? Market' - the shared scar: pain or mistake you've lived that your ideal client is living now. That is credibility, not coincidence.

- 'Market ? Story' - channel, tone, content. Where they already pay attention - not where you'd prefer to be

seen.

- 'Value ? Story' - the opinion only you hold this way. The belief some in your industry would quietly disagree with. Friction is usually where conviction lives.

Hit all three and you get a Conviction Story: meaning, belonging, a reason to move. Miss one and you get either a brand that looks pretty and sells nothing, or a funnel that sells once and never retains.

This is also how you spot the Confidence Trick in the wild.

A founder with Market and Story but no Value is a performer - borrowed desire, no record.

A founder with Value and Story but no Market is a monk with a podcast.

A founder with Value and Market but no Story is a competent operator nobody can repeat at dinner - Tom's problem before he got the sentence.

Self-audit before it goes near a deck or a dinner party: could a stranger repeat the gist after one read? Does it sound like you? Clear enemy? Specific person's pain? Promised Land concrete? Real proof or a plan to get some? Comfortable saying it aloud? Three not yet's and you go back to whichever circle is thinnest - usually Value, because it's the one people rush. A Conviction Story on shaky Value reads confident until someone asks a follow-up.

The Trinity is not a workshop toy. It is a diagnostic X-ray. Point it at yourself before you point it at clients.

'How it connects to the Trick'

Confidence is a performance. Performance is what you do when you skip Value and try to win Market with Story alone - deck, swagger, raise cosplay, eye contact with nothing behind it. Conviction is a record. The record lives in Value - lived Experience and Expertise under a regulated Ego.

Build the three circles until the Conviction Story is inevitable. Then the Six Beats have somewhere honest to land. Then Attention is not begging. It is recognition.

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Proverbs said it before branding did.

Next: why Ego, unchecked, dilutes the whole machine - even when Experience and Expertise are strong.

He could explain what he did in a conversation but not in a sentence.

08 - Ego Dilutes

You can have the scars and the craft and still lose the room.

The formula I use - blunt on purpose:

'(Experience x Expertise) / Ego'

Numerator: what you've done and what you know.

Denominator: how much of you is in the way.

High Ego dilutes conversion even when the craft is strong. That is not morality. That is physics.

And Ego, here, is not pub-fight swagger or scripture waved like a bat. It is locus of attention.

Self - or other.

The biggest lesson recovery taught me - and I learned it hardest sponsoring men:

Out there in the madness as an addict, it is all about what you can 'get'.

In recovery it becomes about what you can 'give' - because, in actual fact, that is what gets you everything.

When I sponsor, spiritual fitness shoots through the roof. More energy - which I have come to believe is the Holy Spirit. Higher intuition. I just feel better. We say it in the rooms: once you focus on other people's problems, yours shrivel away and die from neglect.

Same math for founders.

High Ego = external focus collapsed inward: abundance as personal scoreboard, taking, how do I look, what do I extract from the room. The buyer becomes a prop in your status play. They feel it. Walken's seventeen pantomimes. The body tells.

Regulated Ego = attention on the other: service, their Promised Land, their Tuesday morning. Giving the Gift that actually bridges. You still get paid. You just stopped making the payment the point of the story.

That turn - get -> give - is the Act 2 to Act 3 hinge wearing different clothes. Warrior takes. Wise king serves. The denominator shrinks. The numerator finally travels.

In Your Story Is Your Strategy I drew three circles for narrative identity:

'Experience' - what I've done. Journey, hits, failures, lessons.

'Expertise' - what I know. Craft, domain, years on the tools.

'Ego' - who I am / who I wish to be seen as. Self-perception, values, aspiration - and the mask.

Overlaps:

- Experience ? Expertise -> 'Credibility'
- Expertise ? Ego -> 'Authenticity'
- Ego ? Experience -> 'Essence'
- Centre -> 'Conviction'

When Ego inflates - when the story is about what I get - Authenticity becomes performance. Essence becomes brand voice paste. Credibility gets spent on status. Conviction collapses into confidence theatre: Bond Street Creative Director, HBR under the arm, Rolex as personality, eye contact with nothing behind it.

I lived that denominator. Coke, charm, lack of scruples, Play-Doh with the truth. Advertising rewards a certain size of Ego. It also bankrupts the man wearing it. Recovery did not make me small. It moved the camera off my face and onto the person across the table.

Founders make the same error with better metrics.

They confuse a big personal brand with a big record. They lead with aspiration (Ego) before receipts (Experience) or craft (Expertise). Mimetic desire does the rest - they want the status the other founder has, so they perform it early. Girard's ladder. Baudrillard's copy. The Confidence Trick with a Notion template. Taking dressed as "building in public."

The fix is not ego death. Monks rarely close enterprise deals. The fix is division: keep Experience and Expertise climbing faster than Ego. Let Ego be regulated by spiritual practice, discipline, and people who will call you when you drift back to get - not by an audience that claps for the costume.

Service is not soft. Service is the hard focus: their Change, their Stakes, their Enemy, their Land - then your Gift as bridge, then Proof. Story last. Other first. That is how the Trinity stops being a workshop and starts converting.

Christianity has its own language for this. Paul - the other one - calls it the old man and the new man. Put off the old, put on the new. The bit most sermons skip is that he never says the old man dies quietly. Trust me on that. You put him off. Daily. Like the monkey that keeps climbing back onto your shoulders.

Some people try to exorcise the creature. Cast it out once. Be done.

I exercise mine.

Not the LinkedIn rant version - steam as theatre. The older sense: point it. Give it a job. Pretending the wolf left is what feeds it. A creature you carry is a creature you can aim. The same thing that once tore up my own life now stands at the gate. Not because it vanished. Because it finally has work - protection, clarity, the hard no when Ego wants a hit.

Every founder I work with has a creature. Rage. Fear. The need to be liked. The voice at 3am that says you are a fraud. Most try to kill it. You can't. Or they let it run the company, and then it is the creature pitching the investors - and investors can smell a creature at forty paces.

The ones who make it do the harder thing. They name it. They give it something to guard. And they walk into the room as the man, with the wolf at heel.

That is what conviction is. Not the absence of the beast. The certainty of who is holding the lead, and what it is for.

The donkey never has this problem. Nobody hates a donkey. Everybody rides one.

'Monday drill'

Write three lists: Done. Know. Want to be seen as / want to get.

Circle where "want to get" is running ahead of Done and Know. That gap is your dilution.

Then rewrite one pitch paragraph with the camera on them - what they get, what you give - and cut every sentence that is really about your status. Read both aloud. The diluted one sounds like Act 2. The other one sounds like a record.

Act II ends when the craft is clear: Attention, Beats, Trinity, Ego math.

Act III is whether you will live it - proof, stop performing, write the record.

Leadership is the art of inspiring others to make a story come true. Strategy is that story.

09 - Proof

Theory without corpses is coaching cosplay.

Here are receipts - compressed into Trick language. Some of these started as longer portraits in Your Story Is Your Strategy. Here they only earn the page if they show the move from performance to record.

'Tom - prophet'

Interim CEO. Plane into the mountain. I told him: you're a prophet - patterns across industries, second sight. Explain it as prophecy. He did. We don't talk anymore. The naming was true. That's enough.

'Dr Rich Foster - liminal space'

Client. Musician, director, inventor - Renaissance CV, same disease as half the brilliant ones: could talk for an hour, not land in a sentence. What I did, from memory: named his creative philosophy. Liminal space. The gap between worlds - material and spiritual, life and death, heaven and hell, awareness and delusion. One state and another. That's the creative territory he inhabits. Once named, the work could travel. Before: gifted blur. After: a philosophy the market could repeat - stirrer of the threshold, not just "multi-hyphenate with a PhD."

'Laura Gregory - headache pill'

Great Guns. Decade. She said when she called me she knew it would be handled - pitch sorted if Paul was on it. Workshops across continents; Vegas; the Gunner's. I was her headache pill. Not costume. Reliability as record. Her LinkedIn receipt (July 2021, client): Paul's input shifts your treatment submissions up a notch. Wise beyond his years, he's a killer when he's on your side... It's a matter of pride that he is a part of helping your director win a job. Workshop for the whole Great Guns team in lockdown; guidance that didn't stop when the Zoom ended. That's the record, not the costume.

'Peter Cranstone - Choice'

Pilot. Inventor. Patents that put Do Not Track in most browsers - one aspect alone live on something like 75% of the web. Apple's App Tracking Transparency was modelled on his IP. That is the corpse in the ground. What he did not have was a sentence the room could chant.

What I did: I wrote the Conviction Story. The whole spine. Not a feature dump dressed as a vision.

'Change:' New Retail - McKinsey's seventy-trillion-dollar marketplace by 2030 - cash flowing from Big Tech back to consumers. Individuals stop being the product; they become participants who earn from their data. Businesses stop renting one line of business from the toolmakers and start running a constellation - a Super App built on the app they already have.

'Enemy:' Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple. Monopoly paradigm. Artificial constraints. Abundance thinking that ran out of road. The pipes owned by the people who built the cage.

'Gift:' Choice - the UI for AI. A new web engagement layer. The only technology that lets a mobile app adapt to my needs, values, and preferences in real time, with my consent, using the company's own AI. Privacy capitalism over surveillance capitalism. Flip the switch. Change the direction of the money.

'Proof:' code and patents already in the matrix. License fee plus three percent of gross. Glory stays with the licensee - their people, their customers, their timeline.

Before: invention without a chantable sentence. After: we upgraded the web - and a deck that makes the upgrade feel inevitable. His LinkedIn receipt, eight weeks in: market, value, strategic narrative - and the two superpowers he named, listening and storytelling, as the person you call when the business message has to land.

That is executed Proof. Not tribute. The story exists because I built it.

'Sir Martin Sorrell - the Dark Lord'

Most intelligent man I've met. Incredible presence. Like all gangsters: very, very polite. When he spoke to you, you had his full attention - spooky. Listened hard. Asked close questions. Always a small McKinsey flibbertigibbet in tow - imp / witch's familiar with a Harvard MBA. I ran creative departments for him three times - Hong Kong, Indonesia, Bangkok - while he was commandant of JWT. That is the record. The breakfast legend he was famous for: Grand Hyatt, 7am. You order the full dance - eggs Benedict, soft poach, chives, sea salt, smoked salmon instead of bacon, grapefruit not orange. Cantonese waiter nods. Turns to Sorrell. "I'll have a Perrier." Apex predator. Owner, not bureaucrat. Act 2 advertising gravity in a glass of water.

Pattern across all of them:

Confidence got them in the room.

Conviction - or the lack of it - decided whether they stayed rich in the right way.

Horowitz, Thiel, Arnault stay cameos elsewhere - not your Proof. Your Proof is people whose weather you changed - or whose weather changed you.

Cranstone is the executed closer for 1st edition - invention to chantable record. 2nd edition can add a fresh Sprint corpse if one earns the page.

Your Story Is Your Strategy.

10 - Stop Performing

By now you know the enemy.

Performed confidence without a record. Deck theatre. LinkedIn swagger. Raise cosplay. The HBR under the arm. The Rolex as personality. Mimetic wanting. Hyperreal wealth. Ego in the denominator.

Knowing is not stopping.

Stopping is a practice.

One more lie the room tells itself: intensity is hostility.

I rant. I am good at it. Steam-release. Pressure valve. People who have known me for years still hear the volume and invent the emotion. A friend in Thailand - forty years in recovery, twenty in the church, almost daily calls for seven years - still mistakes the tone for the weather. It isn't. The rant is the therapy, not the symptom. And I never aim it at the person across from me. Situation. Institution. Nonsense. A human behaving badly. The performance is loud. The intent is not violence.

Ranting is not rage.

Intensity is not hostility.

Volume is not violence.

And truth is not unkindness.

There is a floating idea that Christians are supposed to be "nice" and never hate anything. Nowhere in Scripture does it tell us to be nice. It tells us to tell the truth - and the truth is often controversial. It tells us to hate what God hates: injustice, cruelty, corruption, exploitation, the spilling of innocent blood.

Niceness is not a commandment. Clarity is.

Founders perform niceness the way they perform confidence. Soft voice. Soft deck. Soft no. Then wonder why the room never believed them. Stop performing does not mean go quiet. It means the heat in the room has a job - and the creature is on a lead, not driving the pitch.

I run a Conviction Diagnostic. Not a product pitch dressed as a chapter. A mirror.

Three or four questions on 'market'. Three or four on 'value'. Three or four on 'story' - always story last. X-ray the Trinity in that order so the narrative can't hide behind a feature dump. Pressure-test the Six Beats. Ask where Experience and Expertise are real and where Ego is doing karaoke.

You can steal the questions without buying anything from me:

1. What is the Big Change your buyer already feels?
2. What happens to their status if they ignore it?
3. Who is the Enemy - really?
4. Can you say who you are in one sentence the market can repeat?
5. Where is your record - dates, corpses, numbers - and where is costume?
6. What are you refusing now that Act 2 you would have swallowed?

If you cannot answer without flinching, you are still performing.

I don't listen as much as people think.

Body language gives more away than the answer.

If anyone put a gun to my head and asked what makes me a better coach than anyone else on the planet, I'd say this: I have a weapons-grade bullshit detector.

True Romance. Christopher Walken as Vincenzo Coccotti. Dennis Hopper as Clifford Worley, the old geezer in the chair. They've cut him. They've poured alcohol in. Walken punches him and says that's as good as it gets - and it won't get that good again. Then Walken, Sicilian, tells him the truth about liars: Sicilians are the greatest liars in the world. A guy has seventeen pantomimes when he lies. Know them like your own face and they beat lie detectors to hell. You don't want to show me nothing. But you're telling me everything.

I'm like that.

Curiosity with teeth. I smell it. I push. That's the talent. Not charm. Not frameworks. The push when the story and the body disagree.

Almost embarrassed to admit this one.

A friend - villa queen of the Côte d'Azur. Seven billionaires in WhatsApp. Twenty HNWIs in Gmail. Better connected than most "global wealth advisors" because she finds the houses those people sleep in.

We were walking what she delivers that others don't. In my head an unasked question: how did she get this access?

Right at the end she says, almost throwaway - Oh, I learned all that when I was working on a yacht.

Bingo.

Yacht girl.

Young Aussies and Kiwis love those boats. Expensive hulls. Billionaire weather. She's mopped their vomit, looked after their kids, picked up their condoms. They hold no mystique. If she, you, me, and Elon Musk shared a room, she would treat Musk like a human being - and most people who say that are lying. The second I heard yacht girl, everything clicked. Record, not costume. Access explained. Mystery gone. That's the Diagnostic when it works: one true line and the Trinity stops performing.

Recovery taught me the same muscle. Inventory. Amend. Refuse. Daily. Faith is not a closing technique; for me it is how the denominator stays sane - Jesus, Father, Spirit; discipline equals freedom; He does the heavy lifting I used to assign to cocaine and charm.

Your practice may not wear a cross. It still needs a rhythm that outranks applause.

Stop performing does not mean go quiet. It means the next time you walk into a room, the story you tell can survive daylight - and a Walken in the chair who can smell when it can't. No Play-Doh. No magic bullet. Delayed gratification over the hit.

'Monday'

Run market / value / story on yourself - story last. Write the ugly answers. Watch your own body when you lie. That document is worth more than another brand film.

Next chapter: write the record - what to do with the rest of your week, and how the Sprint sits as a path, not a dunk.

Who am I? What do I want? Why should you care?

11 - Write the Record

Confidence is a performance. Conviction is a record.

You have the disease named. The machine mapped. The craft in your hands. The only chapter left is verbs.

'This week'

1. Write the six beats in six sentences.
2. Circle Value / Market / Story - where is the hole? Story last.
3. Run (ExE)/Ego on yourself in one paragraph. Watch your body when you lie.
4. List what you refuse now - and who will hold you to it.
5. Put one proof in public or in the pipeline: a line, a case, a conversation where you stop selling costume.

Do not build another deck until those five exist.

Rooms do not respond to features, roadmaps, or "we're a platform that helps..." They respond to founders who show up with a record. Confidence is a mood. Conviction is a record. Rooms can tell the difference instantly.

I once built the whole shopfront for a music-video producer who'd already conquered the rooms that matter - awards, fashion week, the tentpole calendar. Clear positioning. Monetisation path. Creative assets ready to run. The key to the kingdom, handed over.

She thanked me. She meant it. Then life and tentpoles ate the activation.

That's the part founders hate hearing: the record isn't the deck. The record is what you do after someone hands you the sentence. I can give you the line the market will repeat. I cannot walk it for you.

Same lesson as the villa queen and the TV founder who got the map and left it on the dashboard. Gift delivered. Execution optional. The Sprint only works if you show up as the person who already decided.

If you want a guided pressure-test, that is what the work is for - not a workshop hangover, not a brand bible, not a vibe.

'Founder Story Sprint / September Ready.' One day. Eight hours. One founder. You leave with a document, not applause.

Before the day: questionnaire, LinkedIn / site / pitch audit, the choke points found before we sit down.

On the day: Conviction Session, full Diagnostic, narrative built live against Trinity and the Six Beats - positioning, core story, offer, objections - pressure-tested against the rooms you are actually walking into.

By five: your Conviction Story; a thirty-second introduction built for the corridor, not the stage; one event-specific opener and how to follow it. LinkedIn headline and About rewritten once the story exists - that is ten minutes' work, not a separate invoice.

What you do not get: a forty-page brand bible. A mission statement and manifesto. A designer's mood board. A vibe. My attention split six ways.

If you want pretty, hire a designer. If you want to show up properly, hire me.

Four slots when the month is thick with rooms that can change a life in one conversation. '£3,500.' The day only earns its price if it is the only thing I am doing.

My mother is French. She used to say the best part of an affair is walking upstairs. Same energy as the

Sprint: discreet, over before the guilt arrives, and you leave very, very happy - so happy you barely notice what it cost. Like booking an extremely expensive escort. The French would approve. The invoice arrives later, and somehow it still feels cheap.

Email with the subject that matches the work. Qualifying brief. Dates. Done.

I will not pretend this book was altruism without a door. The door is optional. The work is not.

Flies fold the map. Bees come through.

Write the record with the wolf at heel.

Not absent. Aimed. Named. Given something to guard that is not your status. That is the last division in the Ego math - and the first verb of Act 3.

Warrior to wise king is not a title you buy on Bond Street.

It is a record you write when nobody is clapping - then keep when everybody is.

I bought the costume once. I paid almost everything for it.

You do not have to.

Write the record.

Then live it.