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BRING YOUR WHOLE SELF

Know your design

Personality, preferences, and the stage of life you are in should all be part of how you set up your marketing plan. I often see introverts struggling with marketing plans better suited for extroverts. Or, parents of young children wishing to launch a 6-figure business while being there for their children. Or, a retiree who on one hand, wants to slow down and on the other, start a new business for themselves. Am I saying these things can't be done? No, but I am saying these contradictions in life stage, personality, and preferences make the marketing efforts much more difficult. If you are willing to consider all of you in your planning, I find enacting the plan goes much more smoothly.

You should also consider the intangible design you were born with. Look to a typing system like Human Design, the Enneagram, Strengthsfinder, or another system to identify the individual way you were created. This ensures your plan

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takes full benefit of how you are designed. I like to use a car analogy with my clients. If you are designed to be a Porsche but you are moving through your life trying to do the heavy work of a diesel truck, or vice versa, you are probably not getting the best out of yourself, or the situations you are involved in. When you understand your unique design, you can take advantage of your inborn strengths, and bolster your weak spots.

Let's look at the Human Design system as an example. This system can help you understand the best way to network and get visible. A projector, one of the three types in the system that makes up only about 21% of the population, must be recognized by another, rather than approach someone directly. A generator type, which is 70% of us, must feel a pull or response toward someone before they can approach them. And a manifestor, which only describes 9% of people, can approach anyone, though they have better results if they inform others while they do it. There are, of course, many nuances in someone's Human Design chart I'm skipping here. I'm not trying to overly simplify this system, but am bubbling up the essence to make the point. The projector would do best at the event if someone else who knew them introduced them around. While the generator would be well served to hang back for a moment, and see who they had a response to before approaching anyone. The manifestor could approach anyone they like, although they would do best if they started off with letting the other person know, like "Hi, I'm stopping by to introduce myself, if that's ok." Since these three designs have vastly different approaches, to create a successful connection at the networking event, you would need to know your design.

It doesn't only make you more effective. It helps you bring your whole self to your marketing. We've moved past the time in our culture when it's ok to only bring a slice of yourself to your marketing efforts—to just say what you do. The transparency needed in today's marketing comes when

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you bring your whole self. Practically speaking, it comes when you bring your *why* into your marketing.

But we need to go beyond just the why of what we are doing. We need to fundamentally be ourselves. By this, I mean our real selves, not the false self we may have developed in defense to our hurts or our lack of acceptance of others. Back to our car analogy, if you were a diesel truck born into a family or culture of Porsches, you won't grow up feeling like that's a good thing. It's the proverbial ugly duckling story: the baby swan only feels beautiful in a group that doesn't come down on it for not being a duck.

At the core, it's not even about sharing your real self with others. How about the gift of getting to know your own self at an intimate level? The more you can accept yourself for who you really are, who you really came here to be, the more settled in your own skin you'll be. That quality attracts prospective clients.

Have you ever wondered how we got all these various typing systems here on earth? Some swear by their astrology, some by their Enneagram number, and others by their Strengthsfinder profile. In Ivy League graduate studies programs, students are required to assess themselves with the Meyers-Briggs or other personality team assessment tools. Corporations create their own tests or buy one of many types of enterprise level of assessments that include cognitive ability, personality, and even integrity tests. Outside consultants have built a plethora of their own systems such as Lance Secretan's 5Dynamics or Steve Faktor's Nine Corporate Personas. Carl Jung endorsed the channeled Human Design system, which set the stage for the Meyers Briggs system. The Enneagram can be traced through Sufi, Judaic, and Christian lineages. There are many types of assessments, and they come from various points of view, including intellectual, psychological, and even spiritual points of view.

How can all of these be right? How do you know which to use? From my perspective, each has something to offer, and

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it's about finding the one that resonates with you, in other words, that gives you understanding and helps you know more of yourself. Each person, who's created one of these systems, has seen a glimpse of the overall universal design, and created a system that brings to life some of the pieces, in ways that made sense to them. Some have divined the whole system, others have based it on observation. Neither ranks it as better or worse, and both have value. Something can be learned from each system that has been developed. If you try many systems, you should sense a thread among them that fits you.

Knowing your design and using it to make decisions comes in part because we have a society that doesn't value individuation. Culturally, we don't practice tools of self-inquiry in a way that leads to approaching the world through our own unique lens. Vision quests and coming-of-age rituals traditionally held this place, so a person might begin to know themselves deeply while still participating or finding a place within the tribe. Instead, in our consumer capital-based system, many of us have learned to fit in, rather than find our unique skill-set.

You must seek systems that feel resonant to you to understand yourself and your design. This is not a frivolous or self-indulgent thing. Knowing oneself used to be a high calling. People spent their lifetime trying to understand their own nature. Now we hurl ourselves forward so fast through time that we barely remember to breathe, let alone contemplate the deeper nature of ourselves.

Nor can you use the investigation of yourself as an avoidance mechanism or distraction. Many purpose-driven entrepreneurs keep learning more and more about themselves, seeking system after system. But it's really not to deeply know themselves, rather, it's looking for a quick fix or as a distraction from doing real growth work. It would be fine to explore some number of systems with the intent of finding the one or two

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you want to study and apply over time. In diving more deeply, you can gain true understanding of the real you. The goal of this exploration should not be to explain away your behavior, or to feel better about the things you do. It's to learn more about your own motivations, inklings, and weaknesses to be more accepting of yourself. This knowledge and acceptance create more alignment between you and the divine.

Say my guides:

You have a deep personal well of power, but may not realize it as you strive to fit in and be acceptable to others. For instance, some of you have the power of fighting the status quo, or of being individually oriented to learn about the human collective. This might cause some clash as our society dictates that we all be social. Your power may not feel like a power at all in the society in which you find yourself! Do not doubt how you were designed by the creator. You must go from the assumption that you were designed this way for a reason. Find it and act on it. This may be hard to understand but remember the world was not designed only for you. The creator seeks to understand all things about itself. This means there are many experiences you may want to reject personally, but are meaningful as energy or experience.

We've also come to believe that we can change ourselves or become a better version of who we are. Nothing could be further from the truth, and this pursuit will cause you great pain as you deny your very nature in favor of fashion or outside opinion. You must find the systems you have resonance with, study them, apply them to your lives, all with the focus of finding the real parts of you. Finding unsavory parts or difficult parts may not feel easy, but this path doesn't promise ease. You must learn to admit truth even when it seems painful to do so. It can be much more painful to suppress it. Admitting it only stings in the beginning and then, gets integrated into your strength of being.

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I know because I've been on this journey myself. I've studied many systems and learned a great deal about myself, both good and bad. At one point, I learned from studying Claudio Naranjo, a Chilean psychologist who presented an interpretation of the Enneagram, that I am vain, selfish, and cruel. Was this easy for me to really admit? Heck no, even though I know deep down I really do have these qualities as part of me. It was heartbreaking as I really have spent a good part of my life trying so hard to be good. It still causes me to feel uncomfortable, and I don't go out of my way to dwell on it for sure! But somehow, I can say I am also stronger for knowing this. It gives me a depth that people respond to. I'm often told how real I seem. It is also humbling for me, and helps me more quickly resolve situations when any of these traits come to the surface. Because I'm not in denial of them, it's easier for me to see them and admit them so they pass through, rather than causing a lot of drama. I have much more control of them than I would if I was suppressing them.

Being honest about your shortcomings does not make them stronger, as many fear. It's not in naming your weaknesses that they grow. Instead, when you admit them, it puts you in a conscious relationship over them—one that gives you more choice and greater control of your actions.

The better you can come to know yourself, the more of you that can truly show up in your business. It makes it easier to create a realistic plan for yourself and your business. By considering the real you, there's a better chance your plan will be realistic to what you can do.

Find your resources

You are creating a marketing plan for your business—not a list detailing dozens of marketing activities you must enact by yourself. Too often, that's exactly how it feels, which can be a lonely and limited position.

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Instead, you can look to all the resources available to you. Stretch beyond your own personal skill sets or resources, which can only deliver a business you alone create. Instead, imagine what you could do with the right strategic partnerships, or resources above and beyond yours. Increase the impact you make by becoming a part of a larger professional community. Think about how you can tap into your spiritual traditions to accomplish more. Don't feel like your business is all on you. It's not.

Your plan doesn't only involve you and your customers. In truth, your business came here to do something beyond you. Yes, it's your business, and maybe it's being run by you. Or maybe you are the inventor of/or main service provider in it. Yes, it's terribly personal, but it's not really all about you. You and your business are separate entities; each with your own energy and desires.

Your marketing plan should name where your business wants to go in terms of visibility. Your job is finding the resources—money, people, opportunities—for it to have that level of visibility. This takes the situation out of the limited *I* of the business person, and into the greatest potential of the business.

Your marketing plan is to go where your business wants to go, it's your role to take you both there.

What if you and your business have different ideas about what kind of visibility your business should have? In my experience, it's best to let the business guide this. We tend to cloud our marketing plans with hopes, fears, and what we believe our financial needs to be. Our business usually has a clearer vision that's connected to our divine path. In truth, we are all here on a spiritual journey and often, our

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entrepreneurial activities are part of that spiritual ride, rather than the material one. Most of us can't get over our human thoughts about money when it comes to our business.

Even if it seems like there's a difference, more often than not, the entrepreneur's view on visibility and their businesses views on visibility come together at some point. Great, now you both want the same thing! It's usually only the timing that is different. Either the business wants a high level of visibility that seems scary for the entrepreneur at this time of their life, or the business wants to coast along at a time the entrepreneur believes it should be growing. I believe you'd do well to follow the lead of your business and trust in a higher divine order at play, even if it seems personally uncomfortable.

Besides, we don't always see what's happening at the time it's happening. Have you ever experienced a period in your life that seemed fallow or stagnant, only later to realize you were gaining the exact skill set you needed in order to take a giant step forward in your life?

Nancy was an art buyer, who had great skill in her craft, and whose clients loved her work. But the projects were not coming in routinely enough for her business to feel stable. She experienced times of overwhelm when she had too many projects, and fear when there was too little work, causing her to scramble for more. Although she loved her business, she longed for it to grow into something both comfortable to her schedule and financial needs. Then she was invited to bid for a bigger project than she had yet had. This meant she had to hire some outside help to put the proposal together, and assemble a larger internal team than she was used to putting on her projects. Then, during the process of bidding for this job, her admin person let her know she was going to quit, one of the consultants she brought in for the internal team fainted during the proposal presentation and had to go to the hospital, and Nancy herself got into a car accident. To top it off, she wasn't awarded the large job.

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Although this seemed like just the opposite of what she needed, it started her down the path of getting to the business she wanted. In the aftermath of everything that had happened, Nancy had to take back the tasks her admin was doing, and set them up in a way that worked for her, rather than how her assistant had wanted to do them. She began learning every aspect of her business. In doing so, she realized she could do more if she upgraded her project management skills. So she took a course to become certified in this. She hired a bookkeeper and set up internal systems. Her business became more solid and streamlined. When she realized she was uncomfortable with creating relationships with strangers, she started attending more networking and social events. Taking this small risk over and over, she became more comfortable with her own value, and how she is received by others. She went through every aspect of her professional and personal finances, cutting and organizing until she felt comfortable with what was coming in and going out. She could now discuss them and make decisions around them. Although she didn't have enough work coming in, and the future of her business was uncertain, Nancy focused on getting comfortable with the reality of her current business, her skill set, and her desires for more business. This led her to find the courage to invest money in her business, hire outside help to refresh her website, and pursue new business opportunities, rather than waiting for them to find her. A few months later, Nancy had not only enough business again, but more than she'd had the year before. The biggest difference was Nancy achieved what she'd longed for—a business that was both comfortable to her schedule and financial needs. She now feels comfortable with the notion that she can continue getting new business at a pace supportive to her because her business is set up to do that.

Did Nancy do all of this consciously? Not really. As these events were unfolding, she couldn't really see things were headed toward a good end. Did she love taking back the

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admin tasks, hiring a bookkeeper, or setting up new internal systems? Nope. But, it seemed like the only reasonable choice. She could pack it all up, citing bad luck as a cause for her business failing, or take a step in a direction that felt personally uncomfortable. By showing up and taking the next step her business was asking her to take even though she didn't always love it, she lived her way into a more solid, confident version of herself and, hence, her business.

What step is your business asking you to take? Are you willing to take it and trust the higher order that might be at play? Or, are you sitting in your version of what should happen and asking your business, and perhaps, even the world, to shift around you? I see entrepreneurs doing both, though only one of these paths reliably works in the long run.

Just how do you find what level of visibility your business wants? Simply put, just ask! That's right; your business loves to share its viewpoints and ideas with you, if you ask it. Since most of us aren't exactly in the habit of chatting it up with our businesses daily, here are a couple of tips on how to get in contact with your businesses point of view.

1. **Free writing:** You've heard of stream of consciousness writing where you put your pen down on the paper and don't lift it for some period to get to the deeper wisdom you are holding inside yourself. You can use this same concept to get in touch with your business. It's helpful if you make a pleasant setting for yourself, perhaps in nature, or lighting a candle at your desk, or finding another beautiful setting to write in. This signals a special or sacred time. Take a few breaths and let go of any need to be in control or any fears you have about receiving new information. It's helpful if you can set aside any thoughts you have, and write from a state of innocent curiosity. If you try to write from an anxious, controlling place, you will have a harder time. Choose

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the amount of time you are willing to write. I find 10 minutes to be a minimum, but over 20 minutes to be tiring. You can experiment to see what works for you. Ask yourself what your business has to say to you. Set the timer, then put your pen on the paper or hands on the keyboard, and write anything that comes up in your mind. I mean anything, so long as you don't stop writing. If you start thinking about the laundry, ask yourself what your business perspective might be on that and write it. If you are thinking how silly this effort seems, ask your business what it has to say about that. Try to accept anything that comes up, and get it all out on paper with the hope that you can begin to have a dialogue with your business. It might take a time or two of trying before your business (or the part of you that can tap into the spirit of your business) feels safe enough to say something real. After all, you've likely been ignoring it for some number of years now.

2. **Visualization:** The following is a visualization I created to tap into the same information. If you prefer to listen to it, either read through it while recording it and play it back for yourself, or download it here: lindabasso.com/reluctantmarketer

Find a comfortable seated position. Feel the surface beneath your legs, what your feet are touching, and notice the position of your back. Lengthen through your spine so your head and neck come over your hips, without your head or your shoulders slumping forward. Resting comfortably, imagine a golden light surrounding you, bringing you a deep sense of peace and acceptance. Breathe in this light, letting it infuse every cell in your body. Bathed in this loving light, imagine your business is now sitting across from you in its own chair. For even though your business seems to be yours, and may be of you, it is also separate from you. Your

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business has come to be in this time with its own agenda, its own ideas, and its own contribution that it wants to make. You are in partnership together on this journey. If you can approach a conversation with your business with curiosity and non-judgment, it can share with you what it needs to grow or make the contribution it wants to. First, ask your business what contribution it wants to focus on making in the coming year. Or, you can ask about next week. Pick a time you are curious about. Listen as your business tells you or shows you pictures, or communicates in some way to you about the contribution it wants to make, and by whom this contribution is being received. [pause] If you didn't receive anything, relax and be willing to allow this information to come in. Take whatever comes without judging it. Or, trust that it will reveal itself at another time. Now, ask your business what level of visibility it wants to have to be able to make this contribution. Again, listen to what your business has to say, or the pictures it shows you, or however it wants to communicate this information to you. Allow the information to unfold naturally and easily. Perhaps you have a small level of visibility, only working with a limited number of people. If so, know that it is totally fine. Or perhaps, you see yourself working with hundreds of people over the life of your business. Maybe thousands. Whatever you see or hear, know that all's well. [pause] If you notice any discomfort in yourself in receiving this information, be willing to set it aside for now. This can be dealt with at another time. When your business has shared the visibility it desires with you, thank it for sharing. Let it know that you will visit it regularly, to check in and share information. Become aware of your physical body again. Your feet on the floor, your legs on the chair, and the position of your back. Come out of the visualization slowly, and open your eyes when ready.

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Now that you have an idea of the kind of visibility your business desires, it's up to you to support it. If you are responsible for creating the visibility your business wants, just how do you find the resources for that? You need to tap into resources beyond the financial ones you need to have in place to enact your plan. Look at the people you know, the networks you are part of, vendors available to you, and even technology solutions. Yes, getting your business going in the right direction rests a lot on you, but not totally. Any successful person has a slew of people behind them supporting them.

It's helpful if you create clarity for yourself, as most people are amazed by the amount of resources they really have in their lives. Go through the list below and note what you have resources for and what you do not. You want to know what support you have, and what may be missing to move forward gracefully.

What if you are lacking support in one or more areas? No problem! In coaching, we call this upgrading your network. It means you consciously seek out anything missing from your professional resource pool, so you have the right support in order to reach your business goals. That does not mean you're going to gain all the skills that are lacking for yourself. Let me repeat: this does not mean you are adding a long list of skills you must learn to your to-do list. It does mean making connections with the people who can provide them, or can refer you to those who can. A strong professional network means you can get done what you need to get done by resourcing from trusted professionals you've gathered around you.

No one moves forward without support behind them.

Having a strong professional network can be the lifeblood of your business. When you see business owners who get most

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of their work by referral, you are likely looking at a business owner with a strong network of connections around them. We still live in an economy of people who choose to work with people they like and trust. Trust comes from nurturing strong relationships. It's not just about getting business, though. It's also about better serving your clients. When you are a well-connected person, you have the possibility of helping your clients get whatever they need to be successful. When you can refer a client to a vendor to help them in their personal or professional life, or another person who can help them in some way, you are being of service to them.

Here's a list of categories to review on the amount of resource in your life. Put a check mark in two places—whether you have it or don't, and then whether it has to come from you or you can outsource it to another person. Download a printable version here: lindabasso.com/reluctantmarketer

Have Don't have Has to be you Need someone

YOUR SELF

ideas for your business
strengths to enact ideas
personal talents & skills
health & energy
appearance/clothing

PHYSICAL

office or place to work
storage or filing places
equipment (like a massage table or other)
a well-ordered home to support your off time

SPIRITUAL

self-practice
sacred spaces
natural places

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NETWORK

professional connections
greater community
ongoing opportunities to meet new people

RELATIONSHIPS

family harmony
close friends
close colleagues

FINANCE

budgeting skills
money-tracking system
cash-flow understanding
review time
comfort with earning money
invoicing system
bill-paying system
credit to get you through tight cash flow
savings to support you through downtimes

TECHNOLOGY

equipment (computer, etc.)
writing/editing software (like Word)
presentation software (like PowerPoint)
systems to support business functions
(appointment software, calendar, online ordering, etc.)
website
LinkedIn profile
Facebook & other social media

Voila! Go back through the list and for anything you checked “don’t have,” you now know something you need to begin developing as a resource for your business. Here are ways you can expand your resource pool:

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1. First, use the previous list to determine what kind of upgrades you need to make, rather than those that could have someone else to do it. Then, plan to get that upgrade into your life. If it's a skill-building upgrade, like learning a new software or how to budget, and you determine that you need this skill upgrade, ask around for classes, books, or teachers who can help you gain these skills—or look online. Set aside time in your schedule to learn the skills or make the upgrades that you need to make.
2. If you have upgrades that someone else can make for you, get busy hiring them. For example, maybe you want to dress more professionally or expand your creativity, so look for a coach or stylist who can help you achieve this. Or maybe you need to hire someone to create some systems for you.
3. If you need to expand your network so you know more vendors or have more professional contacts, seek out appropriate networking groups. You can find them via online searches, through your Chamber of Commerce, or through Meetup.com. Some are drop-in groups you can go to now and then. Others require a weekly commitment. All of them let you visit a couple of times before you make any decisions. If you don't find a group near you, consider starting one! I've known several entrepreneurs who increased their business by starting their own networking group.

Your networking does not have to be limited to physical groups, although I recommend that every entrepreneur have strong ties to their community. You can participate in online networking in a couple of ways. One is through LinkedIn, which is an online network for the most part. I say for the most part, because in truth, LinkedIn works best when we only invite in professionals we know in person when we start our profile, and regularly

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add new professionals we meet out in the physical world. Knowing each of your connections personally means you have a know-like-trust factor with them, and are more likely to respond to each other if a need arises. Everyone hates to have a stranger invite them in to their circle only to have them start trying to sell them something! Likewise, when a friend or colleague of ours reaches out to be introduced to someone, we are usually too happy to help. Create a profile, and invite every professional contact you personally know to connect with you via LinkedIn. Remember, these should be people you personally have met, otherwise, it won't be effective. You can then interact with people in your LinkedIn network the same way you would in your physical networking groups. Say congratulations to them when they experience work success, send them an interesting article you just read, and regularly publish articles on your own expertise. Your goal should be to create the same level of visibility within your group as you might within your physical networking groups. LinkedIn then makes it easy to reach out to your network—and beyond—when you want to be introduced to someone or need something specific. For example, if you are doing research for a new service you're creating, you could search for people to have an informational interview with. When you find an ideal person, you can see if any of your connections are connected to that person so they can facilitate a direct introduction to that person.

4. Another way you can network online comes from joining various Facebook groups that have your ideal clients in them, or are filled with the types of professionals you need to know. By regularly commenting and sharing within these groups, you can create online connections similar to how you might create personal ones.

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Now that you've created the awareness of what you need, be on the lookout for the universe to send it your way. This means be out and about! Talk to people sitting next to you in the café or at the gym. Ask people questions when they seem to have what you are seeking. There's a world of resource around you if you are open to it coming to you. You can also use online searches and read books or articles to know more about topics you need to be savvy about. This rarely gets entirely solved while you sit in your office. Get involved in the world around you, and experience the amazing synchronicities that unfold.

Ask the right people

I get asked questions by entrepreneurs all the time. Politely, I point out that I could give my opinion but that, unless I fit the profile of their perfect client, I might not be the right person to answer their question. Most pause as they consider my subtle clue, but choose to pursue their question anyway. We are often so hungry for advice in the beginning of our businesses that we ask anyone. Later, we are so wary of having received so much wrong input that we don't ask enough. Instead, try to find a balance of taking in and making your own way—and developing the discernment to know the difference.

Be sure to ask for input only from experts who jibe with your ideas about what a successful business really looks like, and/or have ideologies and perspectives you respect. Often, entrepreneurs take advice from anyone who's successful, only to discover the way that person earned their success doesn't match how the entrepreneurs work. That experience becomes one of those learning experiences we all have had along the way. Or, when we're having a bad day, reframed as wasted time and money.

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I remember studying with one business coach for almost a year before realizing the model she taught was not one I ever wanted to have in my business. I went all the way through her program, even enacted a lot of what she taught with success. It wasn't until I sat down and mapped out how the next two years of my business would be if I used her model that I realized how unhappy I would be having that kind of business. Additionally, I realized over that year how hard she was working, and what her business required of her just to keep up. Although she had skills valuable to me, she was not the right person to help me take my business where I wanted it to go because she had no experience with the kind of business I wanted to have. Since then, I've chosen my teachers, mentors, and coaches with more care and understanding of what they could teach me, and how that plugs into growing my business.

It's important that you are careful about both the kind of people and the kind of advice you look for. When you think about your own business and where you want it to end up, ask yourself:

- Do you have the right people around you to give you advice?
- Are the teachers and mentors in your world running businesses you admire, both in the service they provide and how they market it?
- Do you like the lifestyle they have?
- Do you agree with their ethics and approach?
- Do you hire coaches because they can teach you a specific skill you've already determined you need or because you got excited by their inspiring speech at a conference?

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Asking people who fit the profile of your ideal client can be another great way to get feedback pertinent to your product or service, your marketing, how you deliver it, and how your customer service comes across.

I don't mean asking your current clients, even if they fit the description of your ideal client. You are already in a relationship with them, and they already hired you. This means they've passed the psychological barrier of deciding you are a fit for them, so their input will tend to be biased toward understanding your messaging. In other words, they aren't very helpful in helping you get new people in! Speaking with folks who fit the profile of your client but are not your client can be a simple way to get input on how your messages are being understood, what their needs and hopes are, how they take in information, and what their current beliefs are about your industry.

What kinds of things do you ask them? Well, start by using them as a testing ground. If you are writing an ebook, have a few testers read it and answer a couple of questions, such as what they learned from it, if it made them want to know more, and if it inspired them to take next steps with your work (in other words, follow the call to action I know you put at the end of your ebook!). If you're launching a new service or product, interview a few people before you finalize it to be sure you're building a product/service meeting their needs. Later, have a few use it and share their feedback about what they liked and didn't like.

Any marketing messages you write can be shared with these folks before you launch them to your greater audience. Finding out beforehand whether your marketing creates a response or not, sure beats sending out your campaign messages only to hear crickets in response. Ditto for delivery and customer service. Getting comments on how that experience came across for testers and making adjustments feels better than hearing from a customer who's had a bad

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experience. Using people who fit *your* ideal client profile to preview your materials will help you be sure that what you are creating will be well received.

Of course, I'm not saying you should never ask your actual customers for their input. I encourage you to elicit feedback several times during your interactions with customers to be sure things are on the right track and they are happy. Also, ask them for a testimonial about their experience with you for use in your marketing materials. Ask them to review their experience via a survey or by answering a few questions when you finish working with them. This kind of information gathering will help you make the needed adjustments to your business so it continues to flourish.

In the end ... a plan

If you've taken in the information in this section, then you know all you need to create a plan in your own way. You have identified your larger dream, your authentic goals, and named the amount you need to earn. You're aware of yourself, and know the resources you have, as well as the ones you need to find. You've studied the market and gotten input from the right people.

Once you gather all this information, what do you do with it? It's time to move from gathering it to incorporating it into your plan. You'll need to analyze the information you receive, and use it to make decisions that are in alignment with your business goals. All the information either gets rejected or incorporated. And if it's included, that means acting on it. Too often, I meet entrepreneurs who've been busy gathering information from various experts and customers—but never enact any of it. If your clients are giving you feedback that they want something from you, find a way to give it to them. If you seek an expert's advice, decide whether you should act on it and, if so, find the courage to do it.

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When you've done your research, you have all the information you need for your plan. If you've been drawing conclusions about all the information you've been gathering, you can already see that. If not, carve out some time to reflect on what you've learned about each of these areas. Pencil out your reflections into a plan or paint them into a visual rendition. Or, sticky note them all over your wall. It's not important what format you use. Remember, a marketing plan is like all the other plans you make in your life. It's simply what you're going to do, at what time, and with who to end up where you want to be. If you still cannot see what your plan could be, talk with someone who can help you organize your thoughts. You just might need some help in crafting your plan into a digestible format.

Your plan can be as simple as jotting down a few notes about what you are going to do and when on a single piece of paper. Or, if you prefer, make it more elaborate. There's no shortage of templates on the internet. If you are a visual person, you can create a collage or piece of art reflecting on the information you've gathered—from a single vision board-style plan to an elaborate collaged notebook or box. There's no limit to how you can put your plan together, nor is there any right way. The formal business plans of many pages you've likely read about are primarily for companies needing to pitch investors for funding. If you aren't looking for funding, then you can do whatever you'd like. Caution: be sure it's practical to your business, reflects your personality, and seems easy to use. Why do all that planning and toss it into a drawer? Choose a format you can use often, review every quarter, and update easily. I use a one-page plan with my clients, download it here: lindabasso.com/reluctantmarketer