

A PHILOSOPHY FOR BUILDERS

# The Frontier Manifesto

On freedom, automation, and the obligation to build.

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# Preface

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George Orwell finished 1984 in 1948, reversing the final digits to name a future he feared was already arriving. He was writing about language — about how the erosion of precise thought is the first step toward the erosion of liberty. Seventy-eight years later, surveillance is infrastructure, attention is the commodity, and the systems designed to govern us increasingly govern for someone else.

This manifesto is not a protest. Protests are reactions. This is a construction manual.

The answer to a world being built against you is to build a better one — faster, smarter, and with more people who understand what they are building.

What follows is a set of principles. Not rules — rules are for bureaucracies. Principles are for people who think. They are designed to be tested, argued with, and evolved. The only failure mode is passivity.

## PART I — THE DIAGNOSIS

# Why We Are Thinking Too Small

The average person wakes up and optimizes for the day. Maybe the week. The civilizational horizon — the arc of what humanity could become — does not enter the calculation. This is not a moral failure. It is a design failure.

When survival consumes bandwidth, vision collapses to the immediate. When risk is asymmetric and the downside is catastrophic, people hedge. When society punishes failure and applauds conformity, experimentation dies. The result is a species with the cognitive capacity to reach the stars, spending most of its processing power on avoiding embarrassment.

**Money is not sufficient motivation. Most people hedge it against risk. The upside remains invisible because the downside feels fatal.**

37signals codified how to build a company efficiently — lean, calm, focused. It was the right playbook for 2010. But the game has changed. AI can now absorb the mundane. The question is no longer how to do more with fewer people. The question is: with cognitive labor largely automated, what do humans do with themselves?

The answer is not consumption. It is creation. Discovery. The expansion of what is possible. But that requires a society structured to enable it — not one structured to extract from it.

## PART II — THE SEVENTEEN PRINCIPLES

# Guiding Principles for Independent Citizens

## 1. Your Ambition Is a Public Good

Individual ambition, when aimed at real problems, compounds into civilizational progress. Entrepreneurs, inventors, and builders are not selfish actors — they are the evolutionary mechanism of human society. A person who solves a problem for a million people has contributed more to humanity than a lifetime of private optimization. Understand this, and the weight of your ambition changes. It is not arrogance to want to build something significant. It is obligation.

## 2. The Minimum Viable Life Is a Trap

Hedging is rational when the downside is ruin. But most people hedge far beyond what the actual risk warrants. They settle for salary over equity, comfort over challenge, the known over the possible. This is not caution — it is a failure of imagination trained by a system designed to produce reliable workers, not autonomous builders. Ask yourself: what would you attempt if failure were survivable? Then ask: is it survivable? The answer is almost always yes.

## 3. Automate Everything — Free Yourself for High ROI Work

The mind is the most valuable resource on earth, and it is almost universally misallocated. Rian Doris and Steven Kotler's research on peak performance states makes this precise: cognitive resources are finite and depleted by decision fatigue, administrative overhead, and context switching. A fragmented mind doesn't just work slower — it works differently, and worse. Automation is therefore not primarily a productivity argument. It is a cognitive architecture argument. By eliminating the low-value load, you recover the quality of attention that high-stakes thinking demands. ROI is personal — what has the highest return in your life is yours to define. Identify the work that is irreplaceable, automate everything else, and direct the freed capacity toward it. This is not laziness. It is the most rational allocation of human attention possible.

## 4. Freedom Is the Precondition, Not the Reward

Most political systems treat freedom as something earned through compliance. This is backwards. Liberty — of thought, expression, movement, and enterprise — is the input into human flourishing, not the output. But the hardest form of freedom is not political. It is social. The real test of a free person is the ability to disagree — with others, with authority, and most difficultly, with their own group — without being ostracized for it. Intragroup dissent is where mimetic pressure is strongest and the cost of deviation is highest. A society that genuinely values freedom must protect the minority view inside the tribe, not just the dissident outside it. Fewer regulations, simpler rules, and maximum personal autonomy are not idealistic — they are engineering decisions about how to get the most out of human potential.

## 5. Incentives Over Punishment, Always

Punishment optimizes for compliance. Incentives optimize for internalization. A society that punishes bad behavior spends its energy on surveillance and enforcement. A society that rewards good behavior spends its energy on production. The behavioral economics literature is unambiguous: people respond more powerfully and durably to positive incentives than to negative consequences. Design your systems accordingly — in your company, your community, and in the policy you advocate for.

## 6. UBI Is Infrastructure, Not Charity

Universal Basic Income is not welfare. It is the foundation upon which genuine risk-taking becomes possible for everyone, not just those who inherited a safety net. When survival is guaranteed, the calculus of entrepreneurship changes. The downside shrinks. The upside becomes visible. People who would never have attempted to build something — because they could not afford to fail — suddenly can. UBI is the most pro-entrepreneurship policy conceivable. Treat it as infrastructure, the same way you treat roads and the internet.

## 7. Judgment Is Expensive — Incentivize Openness Instead

Social judgment is a coordination mechanism, but it is a crude and costly one. When societies enforce norms primarily through shame and ostracism, the cost is creativity: people hide their real ideas, self-censor, and converge on the acceptable. René Girard observed that human desire is mimetic — we want what we see others wanting. This runs in both directions. When openness is visibly rewarded, others mimic the desire for openness. Even a purely self-interested actor, observing that transparent builders attract collaborators, capital, and compounding ideas, will rationally adopt openness as a strategy. You do not need to appeal to altruism. Design the incentive structure correctly, and the contagion spreads on its own.

## 8. Entrepreneurship Is the Evolutionary Engine

Centralized systems allocate capital by committee. Decentralized markets allocate capital by experiment. Experiments fail fast and cheaply. Committees fail slowly and expensively. Every company formed is a hypothesis about what the world needs. Most hypotheses are wrong, and that is fine — that is how science works. The function of entrepreneurship in a society is not primarily economic. It is epistemic: it is how a civilization discovers what it does not yet know it needs. Not everyone has the appetite or circumstances to found. The next best is intrapreneurship — applying the builder's instinct from within an existing structure. Newton's shoulders of giants is the correct frame: most significant inventions are recombinations. The person who takes an existing idea and applies it in a new context with sharper execution has contributed as much as the person who originated it. Build new, or build better. Both move the line forward.

## 9. Think in Civilizational Time

The planning horizon of most institutions is a quarter. Most individuals plan for a year at most. Civilizational problems — energy, longevity, intelligence, space — require decades of compounding effort. The builders who matter most are those who choose a problem large enough that they cannot solve it alone, in their lifetime, or perhaps at all — and begin anyway. Enlarge your time horizon deliberately. The decisions that seem irrational on a five-year view are often the only rational ones on a fifty-year view.

## 10. Build in Public, Share the Map

Knowledge hoarded decays. Knowledge shared compounds. The open-source movement did not just produce better software — it demonstrated that radical transparency accelerates collective intelligence faster than any closed alternative. Share your failures as readily as your wins. Publish your frameworks. Document your mistakes. The person you help by being transparent about what did not work may be the person who solves the problem you could not. Evolution is not a solo sport.

## 11. Curiosity Is the Foundation of Empathy

Nothing in life compounds faster than curiosity. The curious person approaches the unfamiliar not with judgment but with the question: why do people do what they do? This is not naivety — it is the most powerful epistemic stance available. Alfred Adler argued that all human problems are interpersonal problems, and that the solution is contribution and compassion — directed both outward and inward. You cannot approach others with genuine openness while still performing for their approval. The practice is therefore two-directional: extend curiosity toward others, and extend the same compassion toward yourself. Drop the need for validation. What remains is the capacity to actually see people clearly. Empathy is not a soft virtue. It is a competitive advantage. The person who understands the most perspectives holds the most options.

## 12. Minimum Viable Expertise

The pure generalist has no credibility in any specific room. The pure specialist cannot see across the problem. The most valuable person in almost any situation is the general-specialist: someone with deep competence in at least one domain and functional literacy in several adjacent ones. This is not about pretending — it is about having enough knowledge to ask the right questions, evaluate the answers, and most importantly, recognize genuine expertise when it is in the room. Deferring to real expertise is not weakness. It is the move that makes the whole system more accurate. Pursue Minimum Viable Expertise in every domain that touches your work. Build deep mastery in at least one. Know the difference.

### 13. Be Contrarian by Argument, Not by Identity

Peter Thiel asks: what important truth do very few people agree with you on? The question is useful because valuable ideas are, by definition, non-consensus at the time of discovery. But contrarianism without argument is posturing, and posturing is its own dogma. The test for a valid contrarian position is threefold: can you articulate why the consensus is wrong, what evidence would change your mind, and what specifically you believe instead? If you cannot pass all three, you are performing disagreement rather than practicing it. Be especially alert to dogmatic thinking inside your own circles — family, friends, professional communities. The groups closest to you exert the strongest mimetic pull and are therefore the most dangerous. A contrarian stance is only valuable when it is earned through reasoning, not worn as armor.

### 14. Fallacies Are Diagnostics, Not Disqualifiers

The usual advice is to avoid fallacies so your argument is correct. This misses the more useful framing: fallacies are diagnostics. When you find one in your own argument, it is information — it tells you precisely where your reasoning has not done the work yet. Stress-test your arguments privately. Steelman the opposing view. Find the weak points before someone else does, and fix them. A weak argument held long enough will be exposed from the outside — and that exposure is the humiliation, not the updating. More fundamentally: advocating for positions you do not hold is not strategy, it is fraud. Lying to others about your beliefs is lying to yourself about them. If you do not hold the beliefs you want others to adopt, you are not persuading — you are deceiving. Fraud is eventually discovered, and when it is, even the correct positions you held lose their credibility along with you. You need not be Machiavellian to win people over. You already won yourself over. Express that — clearly, precisely, without performance. Consistency of genuine belief is the only credibility that compounds.

### 15. Ideas Are Not Scarce — Ecosystems Cannot Be Stolen

The fear of idea theft reflects a scarcity model of ideas that is simply wrong. The value of an idea is almost entirely in execution, and execution is almost entirely in the founder's specific combination of knowledge, network, conviction, and timing. The person who hears your idea and copies it almost never has the same combination — and almost always builds a weaker version. More importantly: when someone says a company is already doing what you are doing, they are thinking about features. You should be thinking about ecosystems. Features can be replicated. Ecosystems with compounding network effects, layered data, and genuine community cannot. If your moat is execution and ecosystem, sharing the map costs you nothing — and signals credibility to exactly the people you want to recruit.

## 16. Decentralization Is Robustness

A centralized system is efficient — until it fails. When it does, it fails completely. A distributed system degrades gracefully: no single point of failure, no single point of control. This is not an abstract principle. The internet was engineered on it. Power grids, supply chains, financial systems, and information networks that concentrate authority into single nodes become the most valuable targets for capture — by corporations, states, or bad actors. Taleb calls systems that benefit from disorder antifragile. Distributed systems are antifragile by design. The more similar-yet-different nodes a system has, the more robust its collective output. Diversity of approach is not inefficiency — it is the mechanism by which complex systems discover truth. Monocultures collapse. Ecosystems adapt. Design your organizations, your infrastructure, your communities, and your thinking on the same principle: many nodes, loosely coupled, each capable of independent function.

## 17. This Manifesto Is Wrong About Something

No human being, regardless of intelligence, has all the answers. This document is not a final word. It is a working hypothesis — the best current synthesis of ideas that have been tested, argued with, and refined. It should be debated. Contested. Stress-tested against experience and evidence. When a better argument arrives, the weaker one should be discarded without sentiment. The goal is not consistency with past positions. The goal is accuracy. A manifesto that cannot be changed is not a philosophy — it is a religion. Approach this document as you would approach any belief you hold: with the willingness to be wrong, the discipline to find out, and the courage to update publicly when you do.

## COMPANION DOCUMENTS

# From Philosophy to Practice

The principles in this manifesto are not self-executing. Two companion documents extend them into practice — one addressing the hardware and protocol infrastructure that makes individual sovereignty real, the other providing an operating framework for builders working in the age of AI. They are intended to be read alongside this document, debated with the same rigor, and updated on the same terms.

## The Architecture of Freedom

The technical stack that implements Principle 17. Home cloud, mesh networking, zero-knowledge identity, privacy-preserving compute, and the design principles for a personal AI with curiosity bias over comfort bias.

## The AI Operating Framework

Seven operating principles for the AI-native builder. How to separate thinking from execution, use AI for iteration velocity, audit cognitive overhead weekly, and maintain the human edge in taste, judgment, and relationships.

## PART IV — THE CALL TO ACTION

# What Independent Citizens Do

Philosophy without action is autobiography. Here is what this manifesto asks of you — not as a citizen, not as a consumer, but as an independent agent with the capacity to change things.

- Pick one problem that is larger than you and begin working on it this week.
- Automate one thing you do repeatedly that does not require your judgment.
- Share one thing you built, failed at, or learned — publicly.
- Support policies that expand economic freedom, reduce punitive regulation, and establish a UBI floor.
- Find one person earlier in their journey than you and share your map.
- Raise your planning horizon. Revisit decisions you made on a 1-year view and ask what a 20-year view demands.
- Judge less. Incentivize more. In your company, your community, your conversations.

The frontier is not a place. It is a disposition. It belongs to anyone willing to take a problem seriously enough to build a solution for it.

Humanity's next chapter will not be written by governments or committees. It will be written by people who decided, at some ordinary moment, that the problem in front of them was worth the full weight of their attention — and who used every tool available to them, including the most powerful cognitive tools in human history, to push the solution forward.

You are one of those people. This document is a reminder of that.

Build something that outlasts you.

# Quick Reference

The seventeen principles, condensed for daily use.

#	Principle	Core Idea
1	Your Ambition Is a Public Good	Building for others is not selfishness — it is obligation.
2	Minimum Viable Life Is a Trap	Most hedges are irrational. Failure is usually survivable.
3	Automate for High ROI	Redirect freed capacity to the work only you can do.
4	Freedom Is the Precondition	Liberty is an input, not a reward. Start from it.
5	Incentives Over Punishment	Design for internalization, not compliance.
6	UBI Is Infrastructure	The floor that makes real risk-taking possible for everyone.
7	Incentivize Openness	Mimetic desire spreads. Make openness the visible reward.
8	Entrepreneurship Is Evolution	Companies are experiments. Society learns through them.
9	Think in Civilizational Time	50-year decisions are often the most rational ones.
10	Build in Public	Knowledge shared compounds. Knowledge hoarded decays.
11	Curiosity Founds Empathy	Adlerian compassion: outward and inward. Drop the need for approval.
12	Minimum Viable Expertise	Be a general-specialist. Know enough to know when to defer.
13	Contrarian by Argument	Earn the dissent. Posturing is just another dogma.
14	Fallacies Are Diagnostics	Find the weak points privately. Fix them, or change your position.
15	Ideas Are Not Scarce	Features are copied. Ecosystems are built.
16	Decentralization Is Robustness	Monocultures collapse. Ecosystems adapt. Design accordingly.
17	This Manifesto Is Wrong	Debate it. Update it. Discard it when something better arrives.