

Build a Business You Can Rely On

A practical operating model for consultants, fractional leaders, and NEDs

Dan Gwalter



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This handout complements Dan's *Build Your Edge* episode, "Build a Business You Can Rely On". Start by listening to the conversation, as it brings these ideas to life and provides the context to get the most value from this guide.

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Episode 24

Build a Business You Can Rely On

The Operating Model for Consulting, Fractional, and NED Success



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Build a Business You Can Rely On

A practical operating model for consultants, fractional leaders, and NEDs

This guide is for experienced professionals who want independence to work, not feel like a gamble.

If you're a consultant, fractional leader, NED, or portfolio operator and things feel fragile, inconsistent, or overly dependent on luck, you're not alone. Most people don't fail at independence because they lack talent. They fail because they lack structure.

This download gives you a clear starting point, a simple operating model, and practical next steps grounded in real experience, not theory. It is built around the core ideas from the episode and anchored to Dan's "Everything" page, which contains the deeper resources to help you go further.

Who this is for

This guide is for you if:

- You've left corporate (or are about to) and want independence to be sustainable
- You're "fractional" but have one client that feels like a job
- Your income depends on referrals, luck, or timing
- You're good at your craft, but unsure how to turn it into a reliable business
- You want confidence, predictability, and control, not constant hustle

The uncomfortable truth

Most independent professionals believe: "If I'm good enough, clients will find me." That belief works, briefly. Referrals land. Early wins happen. Confidence rises. Then the referrals stop. At that point, many people realise they don't have a business. They have a series of accidents.

The goal of this guide is to help you replace accidents with intentional structure.

The operating model (at a glance)

Everything in this guide and in the episode is built on one simple engine:

ICP → Offer → Visibility → Outreach → Rhythm

If one of these is weak, the whole system becomes fragile. You don't need to perfect all five at once. You do need to understand them, and work on them deliberately.

You can find more on Dan's 'everything' page at <https://everything.no-nonsense-leadership.com/>

1. Understanding Your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)

Gaining clarity on who you serve

What most people do: "I help anyone who needs my skills."

What actually works: Knowing exactly who feels the pain you solve, and how they describe it.

Your ICP is not a demographic exercise. It's about understanding:

- Who feels the pain most acutely
- Who has authority to buy help
- Who is already worried about the problem you solve

Common traps

- Targeting peers instead of buyers
- Speaking in your language, not theirs
- Solving problems that aren't painful enough right now

One simple action

Write down the last three people who paid you. Answer this honestly:

- Why did they care?
- What was the trigger?
- How did they describe the problem, in their words?

If you can't see a pattern, that's the work.

Where to go deeper

Use the ICP and positioning resources on Dan's Everything page to sharpen this properly.

2. Defining Your Offer

What you actually sell

What most people do: List capabilities. Sell time. Quote day rates.

What works better: Clear offers that reduce risk and create confidence.

Strong offers:

- Solve a specific problem
- Have a defined outcome
- Feel safe to buy

This is why diagnostic or discovery-led offers work so well early on. They create trust before big commitments.

Common traps

- “I can do lots of things”
- Pricing large engagements before trust exists
- Selling roles instead of outcomes

One simple action

If someone asked, “What do you do?”, could you answer in one sentence without listing tasks? If not, your offer isn’t ready.

Where to go deeper

The offer and productisation materials on the Everything page walk through this in detail.

3. Gaining Visibility

Being seen by the right people

What visibility is not: Posting for likes. Chasing impressions. Going viral.

What it is: Making sure the right people recognise themselves in your thinking.

Content doesn’t create clients. It creates permission for conversations.

Common traps

- Posting broadly instead of specifically
- Copying what others do
- Treating content as the business

One simple action

Look at your last five posts or messages. Ask: Would my ideal client see themselves in this or just agree with it?

Where to go deeper

Use the LinkedIn and visibility guidance on the Everything page to fix this properly.

4. Focused Outreach

Creating conversations on purpose

What most people fear: Cold sales. Spam. Being “that person”.

What works: Human, relevant conversations with people who already recognise the problem.

Good outreach:

- Is targeted
- Is contextual
- Starts conversations, not pitches

Common traps

- Waiting for inbound
- Sending generic messages
- Reaching out only when desperate

One simple action

Each day this week:

- Start one genuine conversation with someone relevant

No pitch. No agenda. Just relevance.

Where to go deeper

The outreach and demand-generation resources on the Everything page show how to do this calmly and consistently.

5. Building an Operating Rhythm

Running a business, not emergencies

What most people do: Deliver work first. Think later.

What works: Protecting time to create future work while delivering current work.

This is the hardest shift, and the most important. If all your time goes to clients, your future disappears quietly.

Common traps

- Stopping visibility when busy
- Treating business development as optional
- Living month to month

One simple action

Block a fixed weekly slot for:

- Visibility
- Outreach
- Reflection

Non-negotiable. Even when busy.

6. The psychological shift

Preparing your mind for the ups and downs of solo work

Leaving corporate means losing:

- Title
- Structure
- Validation
- Certainty

That loss creates noise:

- Self-doubt
- Impostor syndrome
- Over-reacting
- Constant pivoting

This is normal. Confidence in independence doesn't come from motivation. It comes from repeatable wins.

One reminder

You didn't become incompetent when you left your job. Your experience still counts; clients just want it applied to their problems.

Where to go deeper

Dan's mindset and identity resources on the Everything page help here more than most people expect.

How to use Dan's “Everything” page

Think of it as a toolbox, not a course

Start with:

- ICP and positioning resources
- Offer and discovery material
- Visibility and outreach guidance

Don't consume everything at once. Pick what solves today's problem.

A final word

Independence isn't supposed to feel easy. But it also isn't supposed to feel chaotic, fragile, or frightening.

With structure, independence becomes:

- Predictable
- Repeatable
- Confidence-building

That's the goal.

If you want to go deeper, start with the Everything page. If you want accountability and momentum, that's a different conversation.

Either way, you don't have to wing it.

About Dan Gwalter

Dan Gwalter is a former FTSE 100 technology leader who didn't just talk about independence; he lived it. After a successful corporate career, he made the leap into consulting and experienced the full reality first-hand: early wins, false starts, uncertainty, and the quiet pressure of needing it to work. Over time, he built a profitable, sustainable consulting business by replacing guesswork with structure.

For more than a decade, Dan has worked hands-on with founders, executives, and independent operators, first as a consultant, and later as a coach. His work is grounded in practice, not theory. He understands what it feels like to rely on referrals, to juggle delivery with business development, and to carry the psychological weight of working alone without a safety net.

That experience led Dan to create **The Fractional Formula**, a disciplined but practical operating model designed to help consultants, fractional leaders, and NEDs build businesses that are predictable, repeatable, and confidence-building. His approach focuses on the fundamentals that actually matter: clarity of who you serve, clear offers, sustained visibility, purposeful outreach, and a working rhythm that supports both delivery and growth.

Today, Dan runs a thriving business helping others make independence viable rather than accidental. He's particularly known for getting people off the ground quickly, often helping new independents land their first clients within weeks, while also supporting experienced operators to stabilise and scale what they've already built. His work is direct, honest, and deeply empathetic, shaped by one simple belief: brilliant people don't fail because they lack talent, but because they lack structure.

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Dan's Build Your Edge episode

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