

# Alternatives to college.

<https://youtu.be/9qGBICsVeXQ>

<https://youtu.be/ldWlSZjUKdw>

<https://youtu.be/iJL3sb5wtcw>

## Belief in College Has Become Religious

College is a credential factory.

Attending college is the most pervasive religious act today.



by [Isaac M. Morehouse](#)

Imagine a town. Maybe an early New England village.

There is a dominant belief in this town that one must attend church every Sunday if they want to live a prosperous life.

Because the belief is pervasive, those who want to be prosperous attend in high numbers. Those who don't care about being prosperous attend less. Since those who care more about prosperity choose church more than those who care less, if

you were to look at data on the prosperity level of the townspeople, you'd find that those who attended church were more prosperous than those who didn't on average.

This would provide further fuel to the idea that prosperity requires church. It would be considered a must, not even worth questioning. Even skeptics would say things like, **"It's not the *only* or *main* cause of prosperity, but you'd better attend just to be safe and decrease the odds that you don't succeed."**

That is the world we live in now.

## **The Church of School**

The religious belief is that ambitious people have to attend college or they will be losers, or at least fail to realize their potential. No one knows what actually happens in college or why it's supposed to make you more successful. Since the belief that college is needed for ambitious people is pervasive, ambitious people go more than less ambitious people. When employment or pay data are analyzed, they show that college goers do better on average than those who don't. Of course. Because more ambitious people go to college more.

The religious belief is that ambitious people have to attend college or they will be losers, or at least fail to realize their potential.

You might object that the market would not allow such an inefficiency to survive. But we've seen towns like the above in real life. People's beliefs shape their actions, and their beliefs are not always those that lead to material prosperity. People make themselves materially worse off all the time in service of beliefs, even crazy superstitions in some cases.

The psychological benefit of going along with the dominant belief, gaining the prestige it entails, and not risking being seen as a non-believer motivate all kinds of actions detrimental to a person's individual goals and aspirations.

Attending college is the most pervasive religious act today.

## **Why Do They Really Go?**

Most ambitious people do it. And the reason they do has nothing to do with causal connection between attendance and achievement of their individual goals (most of the time they don't have any so it would be impossible to help them achieve it.) The reason most ambitious people go to college is this: they believe that if they don't, God won't love them.

"God" is whatever aspects of the dominant cultural narrative most impact them. Prestige. Parental love and approval. Being normal.

If it were really about careers, it would only take a few minutes of solid reflection to realize that specific employers want nothing more than specific value creation, proven in specific ways. A degree is one of the weakest, least common denominator efforts to doing this and is easy to surpass.

**Attending college is the most pervasive religious act today.**

College persists for the ambitious – and thus the self-reinforcing data about successful people having degrees – because of a religious-like belief in its necessity. But it's not necessary at all.

OK sure, if you know what you want, you can get it more directly. But most students don't know what they want for their career. That's normal and good in most cases. You can't know until you're several years into working and trying stuff (and maybe not even then). But that doesn't mean entering the five-year,

six-figure black box will help you move towards a question mark any more than it helps you move toward a specific goal.

In fact, the sooner you can grapple with and solve specific problems for specific people and create specific value provable in specific ways, the sooner you open up your ability to translate that into self-knowledge about what you do want, and transfer it to other activities and narrow down your search for a career fit.

## **Why It's So Tempting to Go Anyway**

College is a complete waste of time and money for ambitious people.

Most know it in their gut. But they're there because they are afraid to be and do something specific. They fear becoming a solid, concrete, autonomous individual, and all the effort and responsibility it requires. College is the only way to defer becoming a fully differentiated person while mom and dad pay the tab without judgment.

I get it. But it comes at a cost. Every minute you live off others, delay becoming a specific individual and languish in a murky sea of imaginary "options", you reduce the potential of what you can become. The longer you live in limbo, the lower your ceiling when you emerge into the world of concretes.

## **Don't Worry, This is Good News for You!**

College is a complete waste of time and money for ambitious people.

This isn't bleak, bad news. This is the greatest news ever!

To use a different religious analogy that my friend Michael Gibson likes to use (Michael and his partner Danielle's VC fund invests in college opt-outs and dropouts, check them out), it's like Luther's 95 thesis. It's the revelation that you

were lied to. You don't need to buy indulgences to have a chance at heaven. You have agency, and you can determine your own fate without appealing to some bloated bureaucratic institution for an official stamp of approval.

Break out the champagne, and get busy doing real stuff in the real world. Don't live your life by averages and aggregate data that reflect little more than the superstitions of the day.

### **Further Reading:**

[Employers Don't Care About Degrees \(the stats are misleading\)](#)

[Forget the Degree, Build a Better Signal](#)

[College is Dead](#)

[Projects are the New Resume](#)

[Most People Go to College to Feel Normal](#)

[Imagine if We Taught Bike Riding Like We Teach Careers](#)

[Options Are Blinding You to Opportunities](#)

*Reprinted from author's blog.*



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# **“What Do Employers Want?” Is a Stupid Question**

*“Employers want degrees.”*

There are so many problems with this popular idea.

It lacks imagination, ignores the things employers really want that a degree is sometimes a proxy for, and forgets that divergence from the crowd is more likely to make you stand out than sameness.

But it's worse than that. It's misleading even as a rule of thumb based on data. Most people will do things like add up the number of employers that list a degree as something they want, or compare the pay of those jobs to jobs without a degree preference, or add up earnings or employment for degree holders vs. non degree holders. All of these are the same basic process. Take the average of a giant aggregate of data from individual employers and say that's what "employers" want.

Let's examine how stupid this is as a guide to your own career building efforts.

Say you poll employers on what matters most to them in hiring. You get a list of the top 10 things from each. Something ranked #1 gets 10 points, #2 gets 9 points, and so on. Here's a hypothetical employer's preferences:

1. Knows Ruby on Rails
2. Familiar with PHP
3. Socially affable
4. Self-motivated
5. High attention to detail
6. Previous work experience
7. College degree
8. Hobbies outside of coding
9. Knowledge of our industry
10. Able to work weird hours

Remember, just like when you make a list of wants when buying a house, you never get everything on your list. Employers don't either, but instead hire the candidate with the best mix of the most valuable items.

OK, so that's one employer. If we had similar rankings from a million more employers, we'd notice something. No two employers want the same things. In fact, no one employer wants the same thing for two different roles. In fact, no two interviewers at the same employer for the same role want the same thing!

So what happens if we take this diverse array of "stuff employers care about", and add up the scores for each item? College degrees come out looking like the most important thing.

Why? Because it's so big and generic that it's the one item that lands somewhere on pretty much everyone's list. But it's never number one. It's almost never even in the top three. It's a middle to bottom level item on every list. But the top 3 are so different for each company and role, added together and averaged out, no one item will stand out.

This dramatically over-inflates the value of degrees, because it lumps each individual employer wish list into one and says that's what "employers" – a non-existent monolithic category – want, while misrepresenting the fact that no individual employer cares much about it compared to other things.

Imagine if we had data showing that guys with short hair get dates a lot more than guys with long hair. It would be pretty stupid to go cut your hair so that you can get a date. Why? Because you're not trying to get a date with "girls". You're trying to get a date with one specific girl, and chances are that hair is nowhere near the top of the long list of things that make her



open to dating you. In fact, she's likely to be turned off by someone who tries to win her unique, individual attention by changing your appearance to match the preferences of the average of the aggregate of her sex.

It's the same with employers.

You aren't trying to impress "employers" as an abstract collective. You are trying to win an opportunity with one specific employer. Studying the least common denominator among the aggregate group is a terrible way to go about it. Pick specific employers of interest to you, figure out what each of them value, and focus on the top items on the list.

**Even when degree is mentioned, employers don't mean it. Here at Praxis, we've helped hundreds of non-degreed people get jobs that claim to require degrees.**

Why are degrees so prevalent, even if not prominent, on employer lists? Because it represents a vague set of assumptions based on their experience. It means, "If you're not at least as good as most of the people I've met with degrees, this probably isn't the job for you."

That's it. That's not hard to beat! You just have to be at least a little more interesting than the average degree holder. And if you're fulfilling their higher items on the list, you've already done that.

Whether degrees or anything else, don't ask "What do employers want". **Focus on what specific employers want for specific opportunities, gain that, and prove it through demonstration, not empty words and statuses on a resume.**

**PS** – This doesn't even mention an even more important fact. As Taylor Pearson notes, we are moving closer to "The End of Jobs", and in this emerging world, putting all the focus on getting a job is dangerous. You need to be thinking about yourself as Me, Inc., thinking in terms of opportunities, projects, contracts, freelance, entrepreneurship, and agile, innovative ways to create value. That's the opposite of the get a degree mindset!

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## **Build a Better Signal**

JULY 22, 2015 COMMENTARY

Why pay a university to do something you can do better yourself?

From *Medium*.

### **A college degree is a signal.**

It's a signal to the world of your value in the market. It conveys information about your ability, skill, and intelligence. There is a lot of noise in the world of work, and it's hard to figure out who's worth working with. A degree cuts through some of that noise and puts you in a smaller pool of competitors.

### **The thing is, this signal is not that valuable. It's also very expensive.**

Not long ago a degree may have been the best signal most people could get. There weren't many ways to demonstrate your value to the market, so a degree was one of the better bets. Things have changed dramatically. Technology has opened up the world. The tools available to you now have lowered search and information costs, and you can create signals of your own that are far more powerful than a degree.

### **What's Better?**

A person with a strong GitHub profile has a signal that beats a degree. If you've launched a startup, even if it lasted only six months and ultimately failed, you've done something that sends a more powerful signal than a degree. If you've raised money, sold products, done freelance work, produced videos, run social media campaigns, mastered SEO or AdWords, built a website, designed logos, started a nonprofit, been published in a handful of outlets with good content, had valuable work experience, or even just have an amazing online presence via a

personal website and/or excellent LinkedIn and social media profiles, you have a signal more valuable than most degrees.

If you are not very talented or ambitious and you are unable to do anything like the above, a degree might be the best signal you're capable of getting. When you realize that all the other students half asleep around you in class will walk away with the same signal, it becomes clear that it doesn't carry that much weight. It says, "I'm no worse than everyone else with a BA." If getting a BA is a really hard task for you and building something better is overwhelming, the signaling power of a degree might be worth it. But if you are able and willing to do more—if you are above average and can excel in most environments, than you have in your power right now the ability to build a better signal than a degree.

You have at your fingertips tools that young work-seekers and employers a few decades ago didn't. Never has it been easier and cheaper to start a business, offer freelance services, learn to code, show off your writing or artistic skills, and build a portfolio of value created.

### Don't Just Tell Them, Show Them

Consider the woman who created [this website](#) in an effort to get hired at AirBnB. Her resume listing her academic accomplishments and other common signals was lost in the noise. So she built a better signal.

The website is far more valuable than any degree or honor roll listing. AirBnB took notice, and I can guarantee that website alone has created more job offers and interest than she can handle. In fact, so entrenched is the degree-as-signal mindset that this woman's effort went viral

immediately. The competition among degree holders is fierce, while the competition among those who build a better signal is almost nonexistent.

There is nothing in her story that required a degree. If you want to work for a cool company, you can do something like this yourself right now regardless of educational status. Why settle for a dated, baseline signal that says you're no worse than every other degree holder?

## What Happens to College?

Here's the interesting thing: The more young people begin to build better signals, the better college will become.

Fewer people will go because most students attend to purchase the signal and that only. But those who stay will be there for the best reasons. They'll be there because they love the college experience, the lectures, the professors, and the rest of the bundle.

Losing all those customers who are just suffering through the courses to get the signal will hurt the bottom line of most universities. Some might go under entirely. But for those who care deeply about higher education in its best form, this will be a welcome change. Schools will get sharper and better as they face competition. Instead of contenting themselves with delivering mediocre product because they have consumers who feel captive to the need to get that degree, colleges will begin to become more accountable to the customers there to gain knowledge.

Professors—good ones at least—will love this change. Students in their classes will be the ones who actually want to be there for the value of the classroom experience itself. Severing the credential from the classroom will enhance the quality of both.

## How Do I Do It?

Most young people don't know how to take advantage of this new world where they can craft their own signal. They've spent years in a conveyor belt education system that has instilled in them a rule-following, paper accolade chasing mentality. They see degrees and grades as safe, as fallbacks that will magically keep them afloat in hard times. They overestimate the signaling power of paper and underestimate their ability to create product. Product beats paper in the world of signals.

Entrepreneurship is becoming more than just an activity that a tiny number of company founders engage in. We once shifted from farming to factories, then from factories to offices. Today a shift from corporate offices to remote workers, freelancers, intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs is happening fast. Those who learn to think entrepreneurially, whether or not they ever launch their own company, and see themselves as their own firm, regardless of where their paycheck comes from, will build the future.

It's hard to internalize and act on the opportunity in this new world. That's one of the main reasons behind [Praxis](#), the entrepreneur education company I launched. We want to help you

build a signal that is more valuable than a degree. We want to help you do it in one quarter the time and for zero cost. We want you to have fun and become excellent in the process. We want to help you use the tools available and create your own future.

That's why we place participants with growing companies to get work experience. That's why we help them create personal development projects, tangible skills training, portfolio projects, and personal websites.

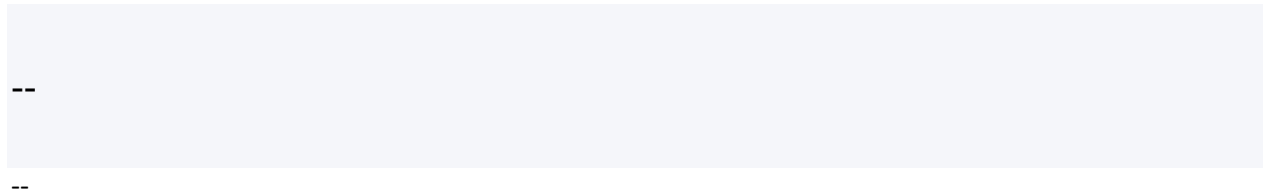
Praxis is just one way to help young people take advantage of the opportunity to build a better signal. The options are limited only by your imagination. Find one that works for you.

## Carpe Diem

The future is bright. You have in your hands the power to create your own brand, to broadcast it to the world, to demonstrate your ability to create value. You can build a better signal than the generic one in the hands of tens of millions of other young people.

What will it be?

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# Question the Conventional Wisdom about College Degrees

Recent efforts to encourage more individuals to pursue college may be misguided.



by Mary Clare Reim

Conventional wisdom says that students need a four-year degree to make it in today's economy. But do the numbers back that up?

According to a new study released by the Department of Education, students who pursue an occupational credential (an education that is career-centered) are more likely to be employed than those who get an academic credential.

This suggests that recent efforts to encourage more individuals to pursue college (President Barack Obama said that all Americans should have at least some postsecondary education) may be misguided. The data also suggest that the administration's antagonism toward more career-focused educational tracks—often provided by for-profit trade schools and community colleges—is misplaced.

Instead, these new data underscore the need for more diversity and innovation in the higher education sphere.

### **Academia Vs. Value**

The study uses data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS), which tracked students who had enrolled in college for the first time.

Researchers surveyed students starting in 2003 and tracked their progress through 2009. By the end of that six-year period, the study found that a greater proportion of students who earned an occupational credential were employed.

Additionally, 74 percent of those employed students with an occupational credential were in jobs related to their field of study, compared to just 53 percent of employed students who earned an academic credential.

These data illustrate the need for change in the way policymakers think about higher education. With college tuition at an all-time high and with over 3.6 million students defaulting on their student loans, students need alternative options for upward mobility now more than ever. **Decoupling**

accreditation from federal financing creates a much-needed relationship between the education students are getting and the jobs they seek upon graduation.

Unfortunately, our system currently reinforces the idea that a four-year bachelor's degree is the only way to get ahead in today's economy, regardless of the price or what a student actually wants to pursue.

### **Getting Graduates Back to Work**

Reforming the outdated accreditation system could help fix this problem. The Higher Education Reform and Opportunity (HERO) Act championed by Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, and Rep. Ron DeSantis, R-Fla., would be a significant step in removing the barriers to innovation in higher education.

Under this plan, states would have the flexibility to allow any entity, such as a business, to accredit and credential courses of study and individual courses, and students would still have the ability to access federal student aid.

Importantly, this could extend to the business community to allow those with more discrete knowledge of their field to accredit programs or even individual courses. The policy of “decoupling” (or separating) college accreditation from federal financing creates a much-needed relationship between the education students are getting and the jobs they seek upon graduation. As Lee explained:

Today, the federal government restricts access to higher education and inflates its cost, ensuring unfairly to the advantage of special interests at the expense of students, teachers, and taxpayers. The federal government does this through its control over college accreditation. Because eligibility for federal student loans is tied to the federal accreditation regime, we shut out students who want to learn, teachers who want to teach, transformative technologies, and cost-saving innovations.

... my plan would give states a new option to enter into agreements with the Department of Education to create their own, alternative accreditation systems to open up new options for students qualifying for federal aid.

... accreditation could also be available to specialized programs, individual courses, apprenticeships, professional credentialing, and even competency-based tests. States could accredit online courses or hybrid models with elements on- and off-campus.

Additionally, decoupling federal financing from accreditation would encourage new and innovative models of higher education to emerge. In a country where high school graduates represent drastically different backgrounds, interests, and skill sets, it seems shortsighted to assume that everyone should pursue the same four-year bachelor's degree no matter what their career and life goals are.

Although college is the right choice for many, some students would be much better off earning their degree online or attending a vocational school to learn a specific skill—or some combination of all three.

These personalized options can be significantly less expensive than a four-year bachelor's degree and can take a fraction of the time to complete. Breaking apart the higher education cartel that reinforces the status quo is an essential first step to providing better and cheaper options for students.

This study from the Department of Education should inform policymakers in their understanding of occupational education options.

While academic tracks have been successful in getting many students on the path to upward mobility, students need more options to fit their unique skills and goals. Expanding education options by reforming our accreditation system would be a meaningful first step.

*Reprinted from The Daily Signal*





Mary Clare Reim

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# How Your Obsession With Options Is Blinding You To Opportunities

Photo Credit: Eutah Mizushima

One of the first steps in your personal emancipation is to realize that the world is full of options, and the few things currently in front of you are not the only from which to choose. But there is a difference between options and opportunities.

Options are theoretical. Opportunities are actual. Options are statistical probabilities. Opportunities are singular, concrete instances. Options can always be added on, and the option set can always grow as an aggregate bundle, so there is no urgency or scarcity in options. Opportunities are temporary and cannot be aggregated. Each is too unique and cannot be replicated.

The finite nature of each individual opportunity can be scary. It feels more comforting to stay in the abstract world of options than to jump in to a real opportunity, which immediately reduces the set of theoretical other options.

Options thinking can be useful to gain some big picture long term perspective, but it's a dangerous mindset too because it can blind you to opportunities or limit the ways you can gain from them. Here are three of the downsides to thinking about options instead of opportunities.

## Too Good for That

Because options are a giant aggregate of all possible activities, the field will always look better than a specific, individual opportunity. When you know that the field is available to you (in theory) real actions always seem a little less glamorous.

The problem is that the field is not available to you. Your life isn't like gambling. You can't pick the field. You have to settle on

specific actions. Grumpiness can result when you do specific things but obsess about keeping your options open. You'll always think you're too good for whatever you're doing and never fully throw yourself behind it. This will, paradoxically, further limit your options as those around you will tire of your attitude of superiority and belief that, if you wanted to, you could be doing something better. It keeps you from entering in to the moment and doing your best work.

## Myth of the Perfect Path

The purpose of options is to be able to choose one or more at some point. But after spending a lot of time expanding your theoretical option set towards this end pressure can begin to build. When you finally do choose something specific, you'd better get it right. Options thinking can make you so aware of opportunity cost (or in many cases, imagined, theoretical opportunity cost) of foregone activities that it puts an unbearable burden on whatever you do choose to be perfect. This short-circuits the best of all human learning techniques, trial and error. No trial occurs when error is so feared.

The endless keeping of options open in search for the perfect assumes too much about your ability to know all variables — including your own changing desires and interests — and deprives you of one of the best discovery tools, failure. All this stress about choosing the mythical one true path leads to another problem.

# Paralysis by Analysis

The ceaseless break-down comparisons, the cost-benefit analyses, the consideration of these seemingly weighty matters can itself become an activity so consuming it prevents you from all others. You can become bogged down in a quagmire of strategic planning and never take the definite actions necessary to achieve anything.

The real problem is that inaction is also an action. Not choosing is a choice. Waiting, watching, thinking on the sidelines has a cost that's even higher than the cost of choosing an imperfect opportunity. When you take opportunity B it means you can no longer take A or C. That's the cost. But the benefit is you get whatever goodness is to be had from B and the self-knowledge of how well B suits you. Even if you fail at it you gain something. When you get stuck analyzing all three options you not only miss out on A and C, but you forgo the benefits of B as well.

Expanding your options set can be intoxicating. For a time, it feels so fast paced and exciting. I could do anything! Why would I do this one thing when I could keep entertaining all the possible things I could do in my mind?

It's alright to play with your options and expand them and think about them from time to time. But you've got to put options in their place as subordinate statistical playthings when compared to opportunities. Options don't change the world or the holder of them. Actions do.

*If you like this article, please recommend it so others can find it!*

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## **Kill Your Resume: Why Professional Side Projects Are the New Resume**

Two young professionals are applying for the same job at a startup.

Person one, a graduate from a respected university, has a resume he got professionally edited through a service online. The resume lists his education, competencies, and relevant work experience during some summer internships while he was in school. By all accounts, it's a solid, polished resume that anyone would be proud of.

He doesn't get a call back. His resume got a 30 second lookover and it was on to the next in the queue.

The employer hired Person Two that day.

Person Two had a resume, but he knew that was the least interesting part about him. Over the last two years, he'd successfully launched and managed six different professional side projects ranging from a custom made WordPress theme that he sold on StudioPress to a email list that curated great Facebook ads for an audience of over 1,000 once per week. He'd also recently recorded a 6-part podcast series where he interviewed the creators of his most frequently used IOS applications.

When it was time for the employer to review his resume, he saw all of these projects documented. The projects told him a number of things about Person Two that a resume couldn't have:

- He had an eye for design — the website theme he built was beautiful.
- He knew how to build an email list. 10,000 subscribers is no small number.
- He was a get-sh\*t done kind of guy. If he had ideas, he made them happen. No excuses.

To the employer, the choice between Person One and Person Two was a no brainer.

## **Your Resume is Overrated — Show Me What You've Built**

So what made the difference that day? Why is it that Person One did everything he was told to do and yet still got passed up?

It starts with a difference in approach: Telling vs Showing.

Person One told, through his resume, why he was qualified to get the job. Person Two showed hard proof of what he could do. The projects he'd taken on and completed spoke for themselves.

The truth is a resume has never been a particularly good way at vetting people for a job. It's an easy thing to game and it's highly commoditized. It's just been the best way we've had for a long time.

But it's no longer enough to list your qualifications on a resume and expect employers to come chasing after you. For most people, it's incredibly

difficult or impossible to communicate effectively your skills, competencies, and interests in a short bullet point.

Employers want to see what you've created, and there's no better way to do this than professional side projects.

If you're a developer, you should be building apps, microsites, and a Github profile.

If you're a marketer, you should be blogging about marketing, taking on projects around your interests, and documenting your learning.

Designer? Design a WordPress theme and put it up for sale. Start a Dribbble account or build a service that offers design review.

**Professional projects accomplish everything a resume attempts to do and more:**

1. They demonstrate your hard skills coding like design, sales, and marketing.
2. They show of your soft skills like grit, creativity, ambition, and writing.
3. They make you more interesting and show off your passions.
4. They establish an online paper trail of your work that employers can verify on their own.

Another benefit of side projects is that they help you build a network, which we all know is how most people get their jobs anyway. The very act of putting your projects out into the world will help draw like minded individuals to you that could lead to huge professional opportunities.

A good example of this comes from Praxis Education Director T.k. Coleman. When our CEO Isaac Morehouse was looking to build out the first iteration of the Praxis curriculum, T.k. was his first choice because he saw that T.k. had been publicly blogging everyday for over a year as his project. The level of commitment and the quality of his writing sold Isaac on T.k.

## How to build your first professional side project the right way

So how do you get started?

Earlier this year I decided I wanted to become more established as an authority on how to get a job. The lowest barrier to entry way I saw to do this was to put together a short free ebook.

The process I went to from idea to launch was simple and replicable. I recommend using this framework for your side projects, especially your first few.

### *Start with a short timeline to get the project completed*

I gave myself a 30 day window to get the book finished, a landing page setup, and a basic email automation done.

At Praxis, we like 30 day launch windows for projects because it forces you to act. The goal with these projects isn't for their first iteration to be perfect. It's to put a completed product out into the world that you can show to others. Paralysis by analysis is an enemy that will take your projects to the grave.