

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE  
\$100  
STARTUP

REINVENT THE WAY YOU MAKE  
A LIVING, DO WHAT YOU LOVE,  
AND CREATE A NEW FUTURE



CHRIS GUILLEBEAU

## More Praise for **THE \$100 STARTUP**

“With traditional career doors slamming shut, it’s easy to panic, but Chris Guillebeau sees opportunities everywhere. **Making a career out of your passion sounds like a dream, but in this straightforward, engaging book he shows you how to get it done, one simple step at a time.**”

—Alan Paul, author of *Big in China*

“Business, like traveling, is often improved by starting poor. You are forced to improvise, innovate, and stay close to reality. You can’t buy solutions, so you have to create your own. Suddenly you have the first part of success—something of value. I got all this from *The \$100 Startup*, which is **full of practical advice about inventing your own livelihood.** I’ve done a handful of \$100 startups myself, several of which I later sold. **Chris Guillebeau knows what he is talking about. Listen to this book!**”

—Kevin Kelly, author of *What Technology Wants*

“**This book is more than a ‘how to’ guide, it’s a ‘how they did it’ guide that should persuade anyone thinking about starting a business that they don’t need a fortune to make one.**”

—John Jantsch, author of *Duct Tape Marketing*  
and *The Referral Engine*

“Is that giant knot in your stomach keeping you from starting your own business or pursuing the career of your dreams? **Chris Guillebeau’s seasoned, practical advice and his efficient blueprint for entrepreneurial success will alleviate your anxieties and get you on the path to being responsible for—and in control of—your future.**”

—Erin Doland, editor-in-chief of [Unclutterer.com](http://Unclutterer.com)

and author of *Unclutter Your Life in One Week*

“You can’t grow a thriving business on wishes and dreams. You need the kind of nuts-and-bolts wisdom that only comes from hard-earned experience. **Chris Guillebeau has been in the trenches for years, and in *The \$100 Startup* he guides you step-by-step through how he and dozens of others have turned their passions into profits. It’s essential reading for the solopreneur!**”

—Todd Henry, author of *The Accidental Creative*

“Starting your own business doesn’t have to be expensive or difficult. **Follow Chris’s advice, and you’ll help people, have fun, and never work for ‘the man’ again.**”

—Josh Kaufman, author of *The Personal MBA:  
Master the Art of Business*



# **THE \$100 STARTUP**

**Reinvent the Way You Make a Living,  
Do What You Love,  
and Create a New Future**

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**Chris Guillebeau**



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*This book is for:  
those who take action  
and  
those who provide the inspiration*



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# PROLOGUE

## Manifesto

### A SHORT GUIDE TO EVERYTHING YOU WANT

**I**magine a life where all your time is spent on the things you want to do.

Imagine giving your greatest attention to a project you create yourself, instead of working as a cog in a machine that exists to make other people rich.

Imagine handing a letter to your boss that reads, “Dear Boss, I’m writing to let you know that your services are no longer required. Thanks for everything, but I’ll be doing things my own way now.”

Imagine that today is your final day of working for anyone other than yourself. What if—very soon, not in some distant, undefined future—you prepare for work by firing up a laptop in your home office, walking into a storefront you’ve opened, phoning a client who trusts you for helpful advice, or otherwise doing what *you* want instead of what someone tells you to do?

All over the world, and in many different ways, thousands of people are doing exactly that. They are rewriting the rules of work, becoming their own bosses, and creating a new future.

This new model of doing business is well under way for these unexpected entrepreneurs, most of whom have never thought of themselves as businessmen and businesswomen. It’s a *microbusiness* revolution—a way of earning a good living while crafting a life of independence and purpose.

Other books chronicle the rise of Internet startups, complete with rants about venture capital and tales of in-house organic restaurants. Other guides tell you how to write eighty-page business plans that no one will ever read and that don't resemble how an actual business operates anyway.

This book is different, and it has two key themes: *freedom* and *value*. Freedom is what we're all looking for, and value is the way to achieve it.

# Stumbling onto Freedom

More than a decade ago, I began a lifelong journey of self-employment by any means necessary. I never planned to be an entrepreneur; I just didn't want to work for someone else. From a cheap apartment in Memphis, Tennessee, I watched what other people had done and tried to reverse-engineer their success. I started by importing coffee from Jamaica, selling it online because I saw other people making money from it; I didn't have any special skills in importing, roasting, or selling. (I did, however, consume much of the product through frequent "testing.")

If I needed money, I learned to think in terms of how I could get what I needed by making something and selling it, not by cutting costs elsewhere or working for someone else. This distinction was critical, because most budgets start by looking at income and then defining the available choices. I did it differently—starting with a list of what I wanted to do, and then figuring out how to make it happen.

The income from the business didn't make me rich, but it paid the bills and brought me something much more valuable than money: freedom. I had no schedule to abide by, no time sheets to fill out, no useless reports to hand in, no office politics, and not even any mandatory meetings to attend.

I spent some of my time learning how a real business works, but I didn't let it interfere with a busy schedule of reading in cafés during the day and freelancing as a jazz musician at night.

Looking for a way to contribute something greater to the world, I moved to West Africa and spent four years volunteering with a medical charity, driving Land Rovers packed with supplies to clinics throughout Sierra Leone and Liberia. I learned how freedom is connected to responsibility, and how I could combine my desire for independence with something that helped the rest of the world.

After returning to the United States, I developed a career as a writer in the same way I learned to do everything else: starting with an idea, then figuring everything else out along the way. I began a journey to visit every country in the world, traveling to twenty countries a year and operating my business wherever I went. At each step along the way, the value of freedom has been a constant compass.

There's no rehab program for being addicted to freedom. Once you've seen what it's like on the other side, good luck trying to follow someone else's rules ever again.

# The Value Doctrine

The second part of this book is about *value*, a word that is often used but rarely analyzed. As we'll consider it, value is created when a person makes something useful and shares it with the world. The people whose stories you'll read in this book have succeeded because of the value they've created. Often, the combination of freedom and value comes about when someone takes action on something he or she loves to do anyway: a hobby, skill, or passion that that person ends up transforming into a business model.

The microbusiness revolution is happening all around us as people say “thanks but no thanks” to traditional work, choosing to chart their own course and create their own future. Small businesses aren't new, but never before have so many possibilities come together in the right place at the right time. Access to technology has increased greatly, and costs have gone down greatly. You can test-market your idea instantly, without waiting for months to gauge how prospects will respond to an offer. You can open a PayPal account in five minutes and receive funds from buyers in more than 180 countries.

Even better, as you build a community of loyal customers, you'll know well in advance what to make for them and how likely you are to be successful without investing a lot of money. In fact, the more you understand how your skills and knowledge can be useful to others, the more your odds of success will go up.

Perhaps most important, the vital career question of what is risky and what is safe has changed permanently. The old choice was to work at a job or take a big risk going out on your own. The new reality is that working at a job may be the far riskier choice. Instead, take the safe road and go out on your own.

What if you could achieve your own life of freedom by bypassing everything you thought was a prerequisite? Instead of borrowing money, you just start—right now—*without* a lot of money. Instead of hiring employees, you begin a project by yourself, based on your specific personal combination of passion and skill. Instead of going to business school (which doesn't actually train people to operate a small business),



you save the \$60,000 in tuition and learn as you go.

Remember, this book isn't about founding a big Internet startup, and it isn't about opening a traditional business by putting on a suit and begging for money at the bank. Instead, it's the account of people who found a way to live their dreams and make a good living from something they cared deeply about. What if their success could be replicated? What if there was a master plan you could follow, learning from those who have made it happen?

# It's a Blueprint, Not a Vague Series of Ideas

I'll share more of my own story as we go along, but this book isn't about me—it's about other people who have found freedom, and how you can do the same thing. During an unconventional book tour, I traveled to sixty-three cities in the United States and Canada (and eventually more than fifteen additional countries), meeting with people who had made the switch from working for The Man to working for themselves.

I then worked with a small team to create a comprehensive, multiyear study involving more than a hundred interview subjects. Combing through reams of data (more than four thousand pages of written survey answers in addition to hundreds of phone calls, Skype sessions, and back-and-forth emails), I compiled the most important lessons, which are offered here for your review and action. This blueprint to freedom is fully customizable and highly actionable. At many points along the way, you'll have a chance to pause and work on your own plan before continuing to learn more about what other people have done.

A few of the people in the study are natural-born renegades, determined to go it alone from young adulthood onward, but most are ordinary people who had no intention of working on their own until later in life. Several had been laid off or fired from a job and suddenly had to find a way to pay the bills or support a family. (In almost all these cases, they said something like, "Losing my job was the best thing that ever happened to me. If I hadn't been pushed, I never would have made the leap.")

Make no mistake: The blueprint does not tell you how to do less work; it tells you how to do *better* work. The goal isn't to get rich quickly but to build something that other people will value enough to pay for. You're not just creating a job for yourself; you're crafting a legacy.

This blueprint does not involve secrets, shortcuts, or gimmicks. There are no visualization exercises here. If you think you can manifest your way to money simply by thinking about it, put this book down and spend your time doing that. Instead, this book is all about practical things you can do to take responsibility for your own future. Read it if you want to build something beautiful on the road to freedom.

Can you transition to a meaningful life oriented toward something you love to do? Yes. Can you make money doing it? Yes, and here are the stories of people who have led the way. Is there a path you can follow for your own escape plan? Yes—here is the path. Follow it to create the freedom you crave.

# **PART I**