

**Examining the Past, Present and Future as a
Solopreneur Through Personal and Professional
Reflective Practice**

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In the rapid pace of the past five years as a solopreneur, there have been agents, lawyers, contracts, tours, publicists, advisors and accountants, but there haven't been enough opportunities for personal and professional reflection, intention and a roadmap for a thriving and meaningful business. Five years ago, I wrote a contract for my then thirteen-year-old son, outlining his rules of engagement with his new smartphone. I shared it in the places where I blog and it went viral. Instantly, my work transformed, rapidly expanding in new and thrilling directions. Some of my subsequent work is evident in the sections that follow; other parts are examined through mission and value assessment, design thinking, processes and procedures and profiling the work of Dr. Brene Brown, Luuvie Ajayi and Dr. Shefali Tsabary. The purpose of this report is not on recapitulating what I've done, but taking the opportunity for personal and professional reflection and creating a roadmap for the future.

My work as an author, speaker, facilitator and consultant on issues related to the digital world has developed into a healthy business platform. The focus specifically examines the impact of technology in relationships, education, family, the workplace, culture and society. "A solopreneur's business is still one person and his/her clients, but national or international in scope. It is a business complete with marketing, advertising, and innovative technology with few geographical limits. Many career practitioners are, indeed, solopreneurs: people who single handedly start and run a business across all 50 states, and sometimes the world, right from their living room. What makes it possible? The Internet and its cornerstone, your website." (Chapman, Dixson) In the rapidly paced days of doing every aspect of this work on my own, it is even more imperative that I use this opportunity to serve my business.

As I began to connect with the work of professionals and experts in these spaces, I realized that I needed to continuously peel back layers of my own work. I was beginning a process in reflective practice and assessment on how my work has formed, changed, currently exists and a vision for the future. As I slowed down and stepped back to assess, I began to see how specific research, new methods, connections and observations of others had a high value.

In going backwards, retracing and strengthening, I was brought directly to the present. I began to take tools and practices right from my research notes and journals, putting them into action on the ground in my programming. I was immediately able to attempt, offer, assess and reflect. The refinement brought new dimensions to my presentations and workshops on the digital world. But it also allowed me the space to ask what I might need to continue growing, deepening and expanding my work. I realized I desperately needed to take this opportunity to see this work on a larger arch spanning its creation, the current functions and an outline the path ahead.

I began to examine more closely what was needed in my work right now to help me continue to reach as wide an audience and engaged participants as possible.

Questions that revealed:

- How can I make my work and myself as accessible as possible beyond just visiting communities in person?
- How can I grow an online and social media audience that had both reach and currency to enhance the platform?
- How can I continue to provide thoughtful, engaged and meaningful work, while being intentional about my family life and my overall well-being?
- How can I learn from others whose reach and platforms are models to my own work?

Inevitably, exploring the past and redesigning the present will lead to the future. Here, in the development of what I might need, is where I began to find true freedom in the project. With a vision for the future I was able integrate all the shapes the project has taken and start building. The future planning asks a lot of questions, relies heavily on past experience, and honest evaluation as well as the experience of others. Identifying my vision for my business, my thinking and my work brings new roads I hadn't anticipated and continuously sets me in new directions. In many ways, this project has become a tool for reflection, action and a map of the future.

Additionally, I decided to profile three professionals I admire or aspire to use as models in my own work. I will examine the work of Brene Brown, Luuvie Ajayi and Dr. Shefali Tsabary to support my creation and vision.

The precise design of the project will be broken into those three parts: how this work came to be, what it looks like now and where it is headed. In those sections, I will explore:

- The path to the present. How did I end up here?
- Tools and processes for assessment, evaluation and reflection.
- Topical research that can be directly applied, modified and practiced.
- Tangible improvements based on discovery throughout the course.
- A vision for the future of the work and three examined profiles.
- What is needed to grow and build a community in my work?
- Identifying new methods and models that I both practice and offer to others.

Part 1: The Past

My undergraduate degree is in Communication Studies with a focus on public relations, media and gender. I spent my years after graduation parenting five children and working in regional community (specifically with youth and family) programming. During a volunteer trip to work with children in red light districts in Calcutta, India in 2010, I was asked to blog for the non-profit who facilitated the trip. Upon returning home, I felt a renewed sense of connection and purpose and began my own blog on parenting and family both on my own website, then larger online platform. A moderate sized audience organically formed. I enjoyed my community work; leading grant funded parenting workshops, the opportunities for training and continued education, while writing to an audience about both my lived experiences and my observations.

The day after Christmas in 2012 I shared on both my blog on my website and my blog on The Huffington Post a tech contract I had created for my oldest son. I had just given him his first smartphone the day before. It outlined my expectations for his use, but it also took the shape of a love letter to a child who was growing up and becoming more independent. Initially, I didn't plan to share it. We discussed it, we modified it and he agreed to it. It hung nicely on our refrigerator for a day. As I began to reflect on the families I was working with and connecting with through my writing, I felt that perhaps it might provide a nice read or an example of how I was managing the heightened concerns around raising "Generation Tech". Publishing this contract online changed my life.

Overnight it went viral and for the next two months I was being interviewed daily by national and international media outlets. I received incredible opportunities to continue the conversation through a book deal, speaking opportunities, weekly national radio spots and a variety of professional exposure. My platform exploded and I got right to work. Within the year, I had a published book, a thriving website and many topical speaking opportunities. I had a full time business. Along the way, I was creating and adapting. I was absorbing best practices based on what worked or didn't on the road. Initially, I built a platform off of lived experience sharing my specific experience as a mother of five and from the families I worked and lived with in my community. But my views and insights grew stronger and more adept with every child, teenager, educator, developer, researcher, mental health professional, law enforcement official, policy maker and citizen I worked with. Soon, I was working across ages, genders, needs, cultures, socio-economics, languages, religions and belief systems and these conversations and interactions were happening by the thousands.

As the years progressed and the work took a more formal shape, I began to develop materials, workshops, lessons, activities and talking points that were useful and practical based on the needs I observed. All the while, constantly processing new content, making this emerging field digestible and supporting (primarily) educators,

parents and students as we walked together into the uncharted course of the digital revolution.

Part 2: The Present

One of the challenges of being a solopreneur is the reflection process – essentially being able to stand in the work and fully assess what’s working and what isn’t. Then being able to slow down enough and create time and space to initiate changes based on those reflections. A typical week requires administrative work, client emails and calls, travel, speaking/facilitating, engaging on social media, contracting, invoicing, banking, interviews or commentary for other sources, reading research, op-eds and topical pieces while writing original content and digesting the work of others.

Here, I’ll use modes for developing a mission statement (**Figure 1**), use design thinking to explore a business model (**Figure 2**), outline the life cycle of a client (**Figure 3**), define systems I regularly use currently in my work (**Figure 4**) & provide an overview map of the components and values of my business (**Figure 5**). They will be presented in infographics and visual aids.

Please note: In the daily rounds of being a solopreneur, it is imperative to consider the integration of my work with my life as a mother of five children ages 10, 11, 13, 15 and 18, running a seven person household, my community activism, and my own health and well-being. While, not fully examined here, only showing my work through a business-based lens does not represent the full scope of needs, operations, motivations or challenges. However, it is worthy to note for future engagement.

What I can say is that small intentional shifts in the family system, space for reflection and the continued practice of mindfulness and well-being have supported both my personal and professional growth. Below I have identified a small group of “non-negotiable” habits and behaviors that help me function at a higher level.

1. I wake up thirty minutes prior to my family members (or allow for 30 extra minutes before work on the road), light a candle, complete a gentle home yoga practice and silent meditation.
2. I must have a period of outdoor activity everyday as well as a midday “DEAR” (Drop Everything And Read), rest or quiet period for 20 – 30 minutes.
3. A weekly master calendar on display, visible and accessible to the entire family.
4. Carpools, appointment arrangements, grocery lists, school supplies, equipment, special events, birthday presents, conflicts all identified, planned and/or purchased by Monday each week. This is imperative on travel weeks.

Figure 1. Developing a Mission Statement for the Present



THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MISSION STATEMENT FOR JBH ENTERPRISES

THE WHAT:
SKILLS & ABILITIES

WRITING, SPEAKING, CONNECTION, EMPATHY, ENGAGEMENT.

THE HOW:
PERSONALITY TRAITS

FUN, OPEN, CURIOUS, HONEST, SUPPORTIVE, EMPOWERING.

THE WHY:
VALUES, DREAMS & PASSIONS

COMMUNITY, COMMUNICATION, RESPONSIBILITY, BUILD A BRAND AND PLATFORM TO SUPPORT & ENGAGE FAMILIES, YOUTH & WOMEN THROUGH WELL-BEING.

TAKEN FROM DAVE RAMSEY'S ENTRELEADERSHIP

Figure 2. Design Thinking For a Business Model

DESIGN THINKING:
**FOUR BASIC
ELEMENTS OF
A BUSINESS
MODEL APPLIED
TO JBH
ENTERPRISES**

TAKEN FROM STANFORD GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF BUSINESS



 What is my value proposition?	 Author, speaker across participant demographics, trusted thought leader, strong client connection, mother of five.
Who is my customer segment?	Parents, caregivers, students, educators, administrators.
What channels do I use? How do I reach my clients?	In person talks, workshops, conferences, consulting sessions, website, blog, social media and events.
How do I generate revenue and make money?	Speaking, facilitating and consulting fees.

Figure 3. Life Cycle of A Client

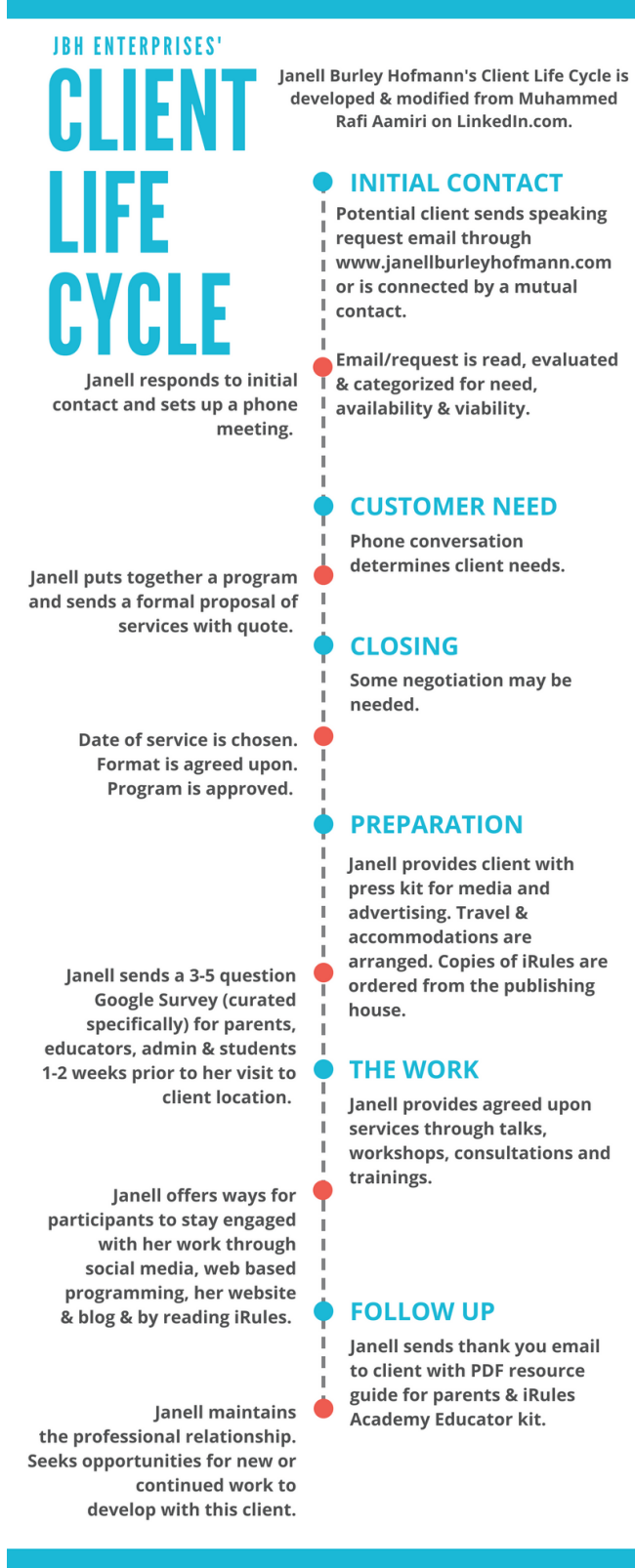


Figure 4: Business Tools

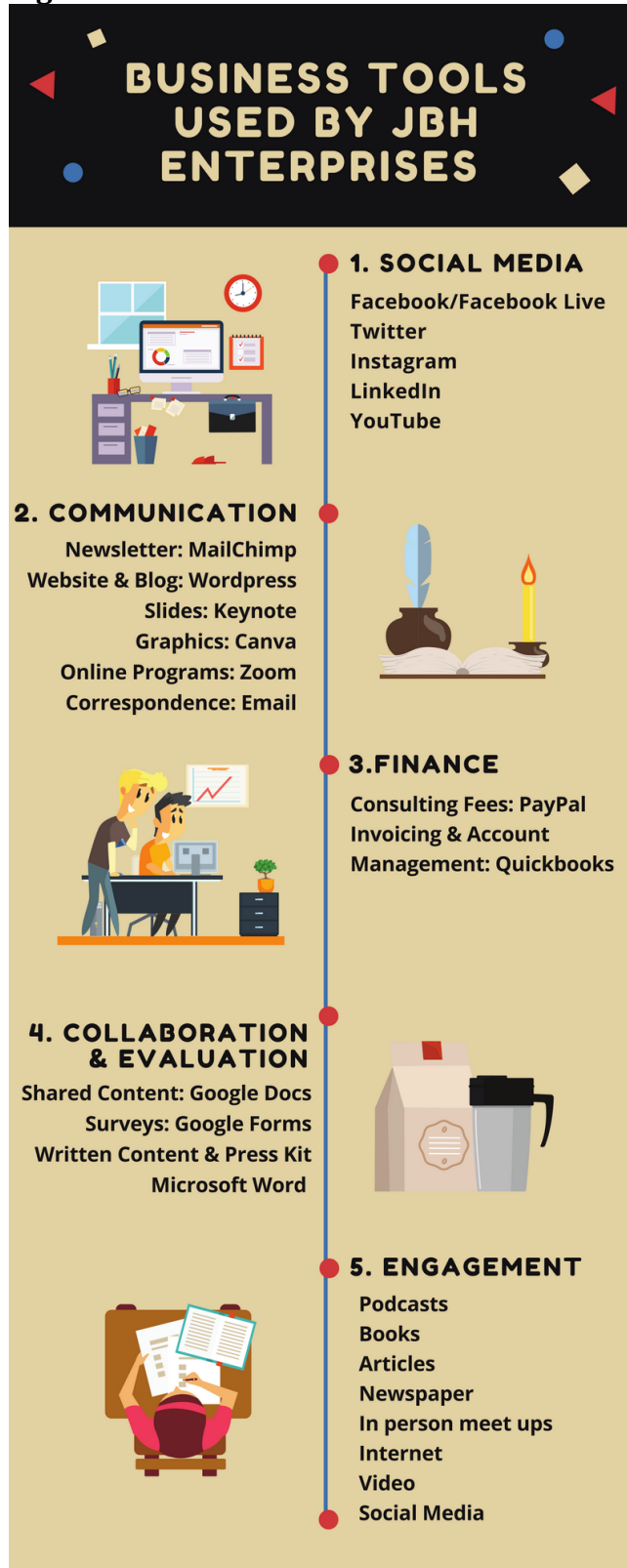
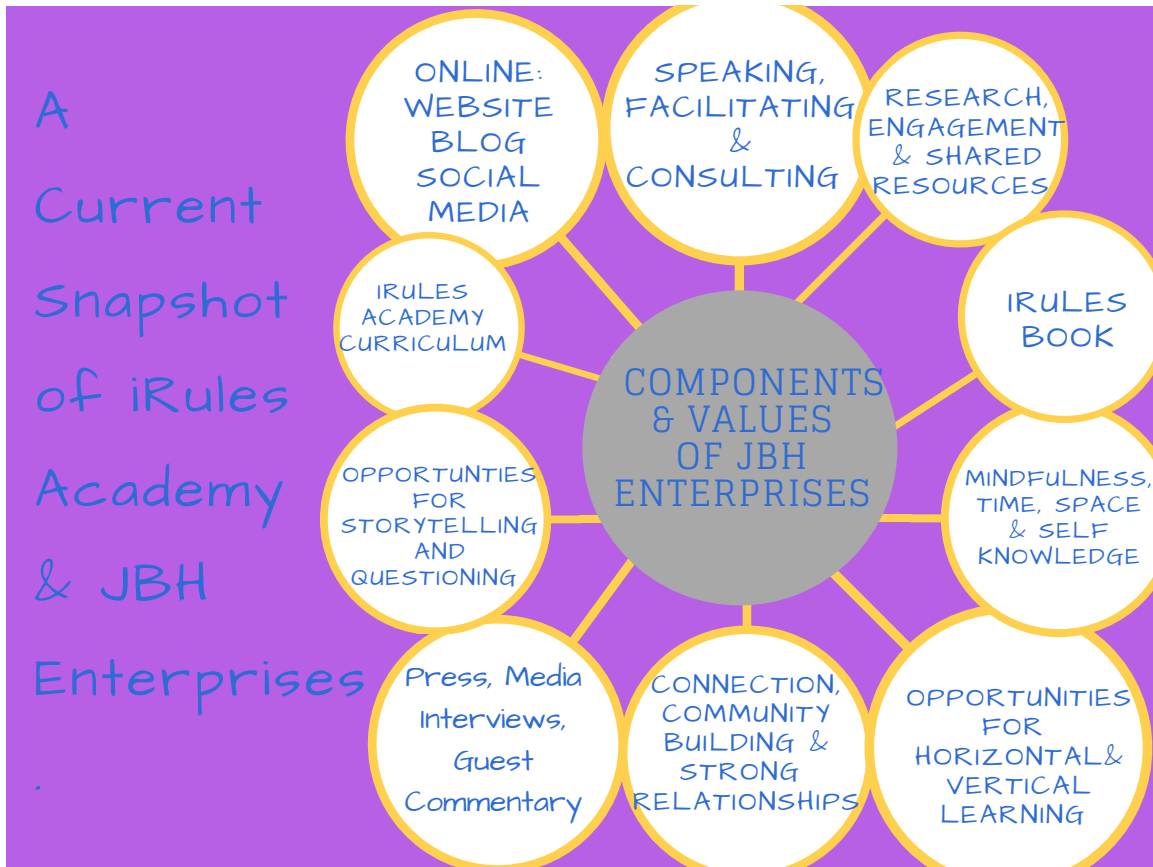


Figure 5: Current Components & Values



Part 3: The Future

Using figure 2, from Stanford Graduate School of Business, “Design Thinking a Business Plan”, I’ve applied it to three professionals whose work I admire or aspire to – Dr. Brene Brown, Dr. Shefali Tsabary and Luuvie Ajayi. “Design thinking is a proven and repeatable problem solving protocol that any business or profession can employ to achieve big results. Design thinking combines creative and critical thinking that allows information and ideas to be organized, decisions to be made, situations to be improved, and knowledge to be gained. It’s a mindset focused on solutions and not the problem.” (Ursery) In reflecting on the work of these three women, I can better assess my own work and vision for the future.

Part 1: Profiles:

1. Dr. Brene Brown

Website: <https://brenebrown.com/>

A. What Is My Value Proposition?

- a. World-renowned Qualitative Researcher
- b. Speaker
- c. Author (Daring Greatly, Rising Strong, The Gifts of Imperfection)
- d. Professor at The University of Houston, Graduate College of Social Work, Scholar on courage, empathy, vulnerability and shame.
- e. World famous TED talk “The Power of Vulnerability”.

B. Who Is My Customer Segment?

- a. Large scale, high volume, high profile clients (speaking)
- b. Therapists, Social Workers, Students (methodology)
- c. Professionals, Families, Individuals (books)

C. How Do I Reach My Clients?

- a. Books
- b. Web based programs
- c. Video and audio programming
- d. Interviews
- e. Blogs and Social Media
- f. “The Daring Way” methodology and trainings

D. How Do I Generate Revenue?

- a. Teaching, training, researching
- b. Publishing deals, book sales
- c. Speaking events

2. Dr. Shefali Tsabary

Website: <https://drshefali.com/>

A. What Is My Value Proposition?

- a. Speaker
- b. Author (The Conscious Parent, The Awakened Family)

- c. Clinical Psychologist specializes in integration of eastern and western psychology.
- d. Parenting Expert Featured & Endorsed by Oprah Winfrey.
- B. Who Is My Customer Segment?**
 - a. Parents
- C. How Do I Reach My Clients?**
 - a. Books
 - b. Video Content
 - c. Online Membership Community
 - d. Online Courses
 - e. Webinars
 - f. High profile speaking events
 - g. Private Practice
 - h. Blog and free content
 - i. Social media
- D. How Do I Generate Revenue?**
 - a. Publishing deals, book sales
 - b. Private Practice clients
 - c. Subscribers and members to online programming and communities
 - d. Speaking events

3. Luvvie Ajayi

Website: <https://www.awesomelyluvvie.com/>

- A. What Is My Value Proposition?**
 - a. Author (I'm Judging You: The Do Better Manual)
 - b. "Professional Troublemaker" and Humorist
 - c. Speaker
 - d. Activist
 - e. Culture Blogger
- B. Who Is My Customer Segment?**
 - a. Women
 - b. Activists
- C. How Do I Reach My Clients?**
 - a. Book
 - b. Blog
 - c. Speaking Events
 - d. Facebook Host "Rants and Randomness"
- D. How Do I Generate Revenue?**
 - a. Book
 - b. Speaking Engagements
 - c. Host
 - d. Commentary

Analysis of Profiles, Applications and Outcomes of Learning

These three women serve as models for my work in various ways. In choosing to profile them as part of my business vision for the future, I draw on their individuality, expertise in their fields and the reach of their platform. Dr. Brene Brown is a powerhouse in bringing qualitative data to the masses through storytelling and relativity. Dr. Shefali Tsabary has used her private practice to inform web based programming, integrating eastern and western psychology and direct and purposeful delivery of message. Luuvie Ajayi uses humor, honesty and activism to speak out, creating content that appeals across issues both large and small.

While these women have deservedly soared to the top of their fields (and aren't necessarily solopreneurs anymore) it is still evident that there is a system to their approach. I am most interested in how that system has served their business development over time. Each woman has worked consistently over the years to build and grow. As I began to unpeel their most popular works, it became clear that there has been great energy, effort and purpose on their journey. I was led to the roots of their foundation. Using academia, the internet and their entrepreneurial skills, they built up and out over time.

Ajayi's truth telling blog posts on relevant and important social issues like "I Know Why Taylor Swift is on TIME's Person of the Year Cover But WHY is She on the Cover?" (The much-anticipated honor of ***TIME's Person of the Year***, 2017). The ground breaking research and thought leadership – as well as ease of delivery - of Brene Brown on vulnerability in her world famous TED talk. (The Power of Vulnerability, 2010). Dr. Tsabary's large menu of online programming created for all audiences. Her reach allows all demographics to participate using accessibility and affordability, in addition to high profile, in person events. (Purchase inspirational and groundbreaking courses, 2017). These approaches, while different in form and direction, follow a framework that consistently includes the ten following points:

1. Opportunities for in-person speaking events with large, connected, engaged audiences.
2. Published Book(s).
3. Humor, relativity and clarity of message.
4. A willingness to address hard or challenging topics with intention.
5. Internet and social media platforms for continued messaging, engagement and community building.
6. Academia and/or Activism.

7. A network of high quality colleagues in cross-disciplinary fields using the same systems.
8. A true desire to improve the world through their work.
9. A belief that their voice matters and needs to be heard.
10. Raising awareness/shining light on issues that matter/impact most people and a moment of reaching critical mass.

Part 4: What Might I Need To Grow My Platform?

In engaging with opportunities for reflection, assessment of my current work, as well as profiling three models for development of a continued vision, I now look at what I might need to support my work.

1. Grow my Social Media Community.
2. Create new opportunities to share the work: Podcast, 2nd Book, Video Series.
3. Develop and practice personal and professional recovery and reflection processes.
4. Use my network of colleagues for support, shared connection and reach.
5. Investigate tools for streamlining systems like budgeting, scheduling, online filing system, etc.
6. Explore opportunities for new connections and reach to additional audiences in organizations, academia, and corporations.

The opportunity to reflect and engage with the work of others, then apply that new knowledge to my own work has been critical. Looking at the methodology and systems I have in place – separate from the topical content and learning necessary for my programming – has allowed for a renewed sense of vision and purpose. While the journey to and through solopreneurship is certainly not linear, evaluation and reflection provide space to create intentional routes to desired outcomes. After examining the roots of my work, evaluating the present snapshot of the business, learning through profiling others and seeing what's needed for continued growth, shows that bringing a process of personal and professional reflection is vital to the development of a solopreneur.

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